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An Anthropological approach to Theology.

A study of John Hick's Theology of
Religious Pluralism, towards ethical
criteria for a Global Theology of Religions.

Heather Meacock

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance
with the requirements of the Degree of Ph.D. in the Faculty
of Arts, Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

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ABSTRACT

This is an approach to theology which defines the theological enterprise as fundamentally anthropological; theology is viewed as a human creative and imaginative process, subject to historical and cultural conditioning, rather than an exposition of absolute truths encapsulated in doctrine or dogma. Within this structure, I locate the theology of Professor John Hick and examine the development, consistency and coherence of his theology of religious pluralism, with particular regard to his distinction between literal truth and mythological truth in relation to the doctrine of Incarnation. I argue, with Hick, that some Christian doctrines, such as that of Incarnation, are no longer religiously meaningful when interpreted as literal truth, and act as a barrier to tolerance and harmony between world faiths. Kant's philosophy, which has been very influential upon Hick's work, provides a philosophical basis from which religious traditions can examine ethical issues of common concern.

I argue that Christianity should welcome Hick's suggestion of systematic moral criticism of its own inherited doctrines, and link his work with that of Paul Knitter and Latin American theologians, Jon Sobrino and J.Luis Segundo, who have worked towards a more precise agenda of shared ethical concerns. I suggest a synthesis of secular and religious moral philosophy, to provide a theoretical framework for this agenda. Refuting the views of those such as MacIntyre and D'Costa, who argue that moral codes are tradition specific, I claim that a shared common morality is capable of transcending doctrinal differences.

Dedication and Acknowledgement

This thesis is dedicated to Dougal.

I gratefully acknowledge the help, support and advice of Dr.Gavin D'Costa, in the preparation of this thesis, and the patience of Kieran O'Reilly in helping me with the word processing.

Author's Declaration.

I declare that the thesis is my own work and that the views expressed are those of myself not of the University.

(It should be noted that, for practical reasons, diacritical marks are omitted from the thesis.)

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Introduction

In a world that is self-consciously pluralist, efforts towards collaboration among world religions must be made in the full confession that religious disputes, both now and in the past, have contributed devastatingly to the division in humankind. It must therefore be the most pressing theological issue of our time, to lessen this division. This thesis asks, is there potential for Christianity to see itself as one among many world religions, as an expression of human religiosity within a particular cultural and historical environment, on an equal basis with other world faiths? It is therefore an examination of Christianity's relationship with other religions which starts with the premise that it is possible, indeed, essential, to work towards answering this question in the affirmative.

Professor John Hick is, possibly, the best known as well as the most controversial representative of the pluralist position. His pluralist model for the theology of religions involves a radical revision of Christian self-understanding; as such it has inevitably been the focus of criticisms and it must form a central part of this study to explore how successfully he has overcome these. However, given the presupposition of this thesis, that theologians' views are grounded in their approach to the questions raised by their historical and cultural experience, it would be impossible to explore Hick's religious pluralism without first examining certain fundamental aspects of his theological thinking. Thus, I commence with an examination of Hick's theology of religious belief, grounding it within the framework of an anthropological approach to theology. I shall also attempt to demonstrate that his religious pluralism is rooted in, and consistent with, a Kantian philosophical framework regarding the derivation of human faith and knowledge. In chapter 2 I attempt, not to defend Hick's "Copernican Revolution" and its subsequent developments directly, but to suggest that the thinking of some exclusivist and inclusivist theologians may be inconsistent with their own concessions to historical and cultural relativism. This will be attempted with reference to the theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and Karl Rahner. Part 1 is concluded with an examination of Hick's revision of traditional Christology; it is my purpose to demonstrate that

Hick's interpretation of religious language and thought forms in terms of a mythological conception of the doctrine of Incarnation is compatible with essential Christian beliefs, and that critics have failed to demonstrate the sense in which the concept of mythological truth is unacceptable to Christianity.

Part 2 is concerned with some of the problems relating to religious pluralism. I argue against the criticism that the "Copernican Revolution" is unacceptable to non-theistic faiths and that Hick overlooks, or minimizes the difficulties inherent in genuinely conflicting truth claims. I also examine the apparent contradiction in Hick's theology regarding the cognitive status of religious language and eschatological verification, arguing that his notion of mythological truth is compatible with cognition; this will involve an examination of Hick's most recent major contribution to the theology of religious pluralism, to be found in "An Interpretation of Religion - Human Responses to the Transcendent", published in 1989. I conclude with suggestions supporting the possibility of a viable theology of religious pluralism based on moral criteria, looping back to Hick's argument for rational theistic belief based on Kantian insights into the innate moral awareness of humanity. Moral criteria, while not admitting of absolutes, open up the possibility of inter-religious dialogue on an equal basis, for they allow for a greater degree of objectivity than religious truth claims and thus provide a yardstick by which the truth claims of the phenomenological religions may be judged. In support of this thesis, I shall draw upon the work of Paul Knitter and Latin American theologians such as Juan Luis Segundo and Jon Sobrino, who have advanced further than Hick in forming an agenda of shared ethical concerns among the world faiths.

CHAPTER 1

The Anthropological Approach in relation to the Philosophy and Theology of John Hick

One of the great paradoxes of the world's religious traditions is that while each began with a claim to direct, unmediated knowledge of God, or infallible insight into the true nature of reality, each, nevertheless, affirms an ultimate agnosticism about the nature of God, or that which is ultimately real. Within Christianity this was expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas at the beginning of the "Summa Theologiae" by the statement that we cannot grasp what God is but only what he is not, and how things are related to him. Even though we may truly say of God that he is "good" or "merciful" these constructs cannot mean what we understand them to mean, for they are simply human language constructs which function as an analogue rather than a true correspondence to what God is. 1. From a very different tradition, that of Advaitin Hinduism, Sankara held that Brahman without attributes, "nirguna Brahman," is the highest reality towards which we reach, but can never grasp. 2. Intrinsic to religious belief is the tension between scriptural revelation, viewed as an absolute, and the ineffability or unknowability of the reality affirmed by that same scripture. How far, then, are we to regard Christian revelation, or any other religious knowledge which claims to derive from revelation, as a "given;" how far are we to acknowledge that agnosticism is a genuinely religious insight? A religious perspective which retreats into notions of the total ineffability of God or the inapprehensibility of reality must run the grave risk of lapsing into incoherence, for that which is properly ineffable cannot be talked about. This study is an attempt to drive a wedge between the polarity of approaches to theology exemplified by the seemingly contradictory concepts of revelation and agnosticism. I shall argue for their non-contradiction and ultimate compatibility, although this will involve some revision of the concepts themselves.

The basic presupposition of this study, and its starting point, is that theology is essentially a human activity; it may be defined as an attempt to understand the fundamental nature of reality

in terms of the referent of religious faith, but the theologian or believer who engages in the theological enterprise remains a human thinker, inevitably subject to the conditioning of his or her own experience and the tradition of rationality which shapes the interpretation of experience. 3. Such a view of theology may be regarded as a denial of the belief that theology is a "given," that knowledge of God is direct, unconditioned and initiated by God himself in such a way that it is beyond dispute. 4. An anthropological understanding of theological thinking predetermines that a certain tension must arise between the relative and the absolute; though the object of the study may properly be regarded as in some sense absolute [whether it is defined as a personal God or as impersonal Ultimate Reality] the human apprehension of this absolute is relative to the experience and cultural conditioning of the theologian and believer.

The difference between these views of the nature of theology itself may be regarded as the root cause of the difference between the extremities of Christian response to other world faiths. In recent times, such responses have been labelled according to the three categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. It is not always easy, however, to categorize theological thinking in these terms, and there is some disagreement among theologians themselves, in categorizing the thinking of others. 5. Broad categories do not always do justice to the range of theological thinking that is discernible, though the very existence of such a range of human thinking may be seen as supporting the idea that theology itself is anthropological in character. Generally speaking, however, the pluralist position may be defined as an acknowledgement that faiths other than Christianity may be seen, equally, as salvific paths to God, and that there are good theological and phenomenological grounds for rejecting the Christian claim to be the only true faith [exclusivism] or the culmination and fulfilment of other faiths [inclusivism.] The pluralist model itself, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, draws heavily on an acknowledgement of the human character of theological thinking and on historical and cultural relativism to support its stance in relation to world faiths.

Professor John Hick is, possibly, the best known as well as the most controversial representative of the pluralist position. His pluralist model for the theology of religions involves a radical revision of Christian self-understanding; as such, it has inevitably been the focus of criticism. Hick has revised and redefined his position on many occasions up to the present time in order to answer such criticisms; it will form a central part of the focus of this study to explore how successfully he has achieved this. However, given the presupposition of this study, that theologians' views are grounded in their approach to the questions raised by their own historical and cultural experience, it would be impossible to explore Hick's religious pluralism without first examining the nature of his theological thinking in its broadest sense. In the case of Hick, the central concern of the first part of his academic life was to explore the viability and coherence of Christian belief in the light of questions raised by contemporary western philosophy. Thus, in his philosophical theology, the relationship between faith and knowledge is of crucial importance and it will be necessary to define precisely what Hick means by these constructs in order to try to do justice to his theological thinking and to determine how far it may properly be placed within the framework of "an anthropological approach to theology." Firstly, however, it is necessary to examine this approach in rather more detail, primarily to refute certain misconceptions that may arise as to its nature and scope.

1. The Anthropological approach to Theology and Theological Realism

What the anthropological approach to theology, as I understand it, will not do, is to deny the existence of the objective reality, the "given", which Christianity calls God. The kind of agnosticism I am seeking to outline is not one which leaves us in a total void, claiming we can say nothing about the nature of religious truth. [Were it to do so, it could scarcely be called theology.] As stated above, an understanding of theology which rests upon notions of the total ineffability of God, or reality, is ultimately self-refuting and lapses into incoherence. The kind of agnosticism I am thinking about functions, rather, as a filter or qualifier upon our present, limited apprehensions of what we believe to be religious truth. It admits that theological statements must

inevitably be tentative, exploratory and subject to revision in the light of the development of human knowledge, and that the probability is that theology will always entail unsolved puzzles and messy, complex arguments. It will be compatible with what Hick has called "*a religious, but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms.*" 6. [my emphasis] and with his more recent statement that theology is, ultimately, a creation of the human mind. 7. It will be necessary, presently, to attempt to define the concept of "an acceptable religious agnosticism" more closely, within the context of an anthropological approach to theology.

From the outset it must be made clear that the anthropological approach to theology does not entail a non-realist conception of what we in the west call God: it denies the Feuerbachian view that religion is nothing more than the projection of idealized human values. It rejects Feuerbach's understanding of religion which states that,

"...Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man." 8.

Equally, it is a denial of Barth's critique of Feuerbach that,

"...a theology which uses human reasoning about human experiences will never get beyond the human to the divine; the only way to avoid the Feuerbachian reduction of theology into anthropology is for theology to be derived wholly from divine revelation." 9.

It seeks to drive a wedge between these opposing theological views, although its starting place, certainly, is that we cannot begin from elsewhere than with ourselves, our questions and structures of understanding. I shall argue, however, that to affirm a Feuerbachian starting point to theological enquiry is by no means necessarily to arrive at Feuerbachian conclusions about the nature of religious belief.

Feuerbach's charge that language about God is a projection of the idealized qualities of human beings has two main implications, firstly, that talk about God is fundamentally anthropomorphic, and secondly and more seriously, [for the theist] that "God" does not exist as a mind-independent reality, but merely as a human invention or projection. This, for Feuerbach is because *"there is no distinction between the predicates of the divine and human nature therefore there can be no distinction between the divine and human subject."* 10. Efforts to distinguish between theology and anthropology are therefore doomed to failure.

As regards the first criticism, we need have no hesitation in conceding that Feuerbach is basically correct, for human language is the only "tool" available to human beings to conceptualize reality. Words are symbols of reality, and humans cannot do otherwise than to construct descriptions of God, or that which they believe to be ultimately real, by means of the tool which functions to order, conceptualize and communicate experience and understanding. Some degree of anthropomorphism is inevitable, unless theologians are to speak of God as "totally ineffable" or "utterly other", which, as stated above, effectively means there is nothing further that can be said about Him/It, and so closes the theological enquiry before it has got off the ground.

However, since the time of Feuerbach, it has been recognised by some theologians that language about God is fundamentally symbolic, and that in order to be meaningful, such symbols must be linked to some non-symbolic referent. This is why Tillich, for example, while holding that *"any concrete assertion about God must be symbolic"* relates all such symbolic statements to a totally abstract, non-symbolic concept, God as *"being itself"*. 11. I.T.Ramsey, also, has sought to refute the Feuerbachian charge of anthropomorphism by pointing out that certain words, "infinite" [infinite love] "perfect" [perfect wisdom] and so on, act as "qualifiers" and function in such a way as to distinguish predicates of God from predicates which apply equally to the human, for no-one would think of ascribing "infinite love" or "perfect wisdom" to a human subject. 12. If we avoid using predicates of God which are identical to those used of the human, we refute the Feuerbachian charge of non-distinction, which lies at the heart of his criticism of the absurdity of

religious language, although we would have to concede the inevitability of some degree of anthropomorphism.

Secondly, it may be argued that epistemological solipsism is not the inevitable consequence of the fact that we describe things in terms of our apprehension and experience in historically and culturally relative situations. What we consider ourselves to know is at least partially the result of our experience and is linked to what we know of ourselves, but it does not follow that this knowledge is therefore limited or constricted in some kind of capsule of self-knowledge. Initially, the human infant seems to be largely unaware of the distinction between "self" and "not-self" but rapidly grows to an awareness of his or her separateness from the context in which he or she exists. From this sense of self radiates our awareness of things and persons which are not-self. A non-solipsist view normally develops in the human individual in response to perceptual experience of his or her environment and other persons in it; were it not to do so, were the individual seriously to adhere to a solipsist alternative, that person might well be counted as insane, for solipsism would radically disorientate relationships with other persons in the shared environment. Such an individual would be incapable of interpersonal relationships, being unable to see other persons as independent conscious beings with separate desires, views, wills and purposes independent of their own. Although our ways of understanding and interpreting start with ourselves, it does not follow that theological understanding must be restricted to understanding only the structures of rationality which govern them, or the self which possesses them. To argue otherwise is as fallacious as saying that my present awareness that it is raining outside tells me only about myself. Every time we attempt to understand other persons' arguments or empathise with the situation they find themselves in, we are in fact recognising the limitations of individual experience and using a projective method of human understanding to reach beyond our own experience, although our own experience functions as a filter or qualifier in relation to the data received. To affirm the Feuerbachian starting point to a theological enquiry, or any other enquiry, is not to concede the truth of solipsism, nor need it be the case that projective methods of human understanding cannot lead us to important theological insights.

Hick himself has written of Feuerbach,

"...whereas his presentation of the broad hypothesis is vivid and memorable...his specific arguments are generally lacking in rigour, their logical gaps being filled by positions in nineteenth-century idealist thought which may well have seemed self-evident to Feuerbach and many of his contemporaries but which have since lost much of their plausibility." 13.

Nevertheless, his view of Feuerbach's thinking is not entirely negative, for, as he understands it, Feuerbach's critique was primarily directed towards organised religion as negating human love as a universal principle and promoting exclusiveness between members of particular groups.

"...Whereas love is universal, making no distinction between person and person, faith as the belief-system of a particular group is divisive, creating hostility between believers and unbelievers." 14.

However, although he has a considerable appreciation of what he has called Feuerbach's "noble vision" he rejects the conclusions he reached as regards the non-realist nature of faith assertions, as we shall see when we come to examine Hick's own theology of the nature of religious belief.

2. The Anthropological Approach and the primacy of Human Reason

It may be argued that in the modern post-critical period, few, if any, theologians deny that theology is essentially a human activity, and that the claim to direct, unconditioned knowledge of God, or infallible insight into the nature of reality is an anachronism. Nevertheless, I would argue that this is not always the case, as exemplified by Barth's critique of Feuerbach, above. Barth has clearly stated that, *"...knowledge of God is knowledge completely effected and determined from the side of its object, from the side of God."* 15. Although he qualifies this with the statement, *"...of course it remains a relative knowledge, a knowledge imprisoned within the limits of the creaturely,"* 16. it is clear that for Barth, the starting point for the quest for knowledge is the object of that knowledge, God himself. More recently, this approach to theology has been advocated by Torrance, who believes we cannot and should not attempt to start with ourselves,

our questions and tentative human conceptions of God, for knowledge of God must be determined by God's own modes of self-disclosure. Torrance rejects the method of theological enquiry which starts with such questions as "how can God be known?" as "unscientific."

"In scientific theology we begin with the actual knowledge of God, and seek to test and clarify this knowledge by inquiring carefully into the relation between our knowing of God and God Himself in His being and nature...How God can be known must be determined from first to last by the way in which He actually is known." 17.

This approach, I will argue, is to be rejected, since it depends on an absolutist approach to revelation and seems to deny a proper role to human reason and human experience in interpreting that revelation. Revelation, I shall argue, should be viewed as a fallible and developing human response to the divine "voice"; no revelation can exist without a human recipient to receive it, and it is impossible for the recipient to do otherwise than start with his or her attempts to interpret that "voice." Revelation and religious experience, I shall argue, are reciprocal; revelation takes place within the confines of human experience and is importantly conditioned by that experience and interpreted by reason; it is not in itself a separate category of knowledge apart from experience.

18. Thus I shall argue for a Feuerbachian starting point to the theological enquiry, for to do otherwise is to abandon the primacy of the role of rational reflection in theological understanding. The acceptance of Feuerbach's starting point need not, I repeat, involve accepting the atheistic conclusions he arrived at. Barth and Torrance, it may be argued, represent the extremity of those who hold an absolutist approach to revelation, as opposed to the anthropological approach, which rejects revelation as a distinct category of knowledge aside from human experience. Is there nothing in between? Certainly there is, and the "middle road" would be that travelled by most theologians. Nevertheless, to travel at all is to commence from some starting point, and each of us can only commence from where we are. It seems sensible, therefore, to move from what is familiar, [human reason and experience] to the relatively distant [Ultimate Reality] simply because this is the only means available to us, beyond and apart from our earliest religious affiliations,

which, as Hick has argued, may be very much the products of the accident of birth and subsequent religious conditioning. 19. Hick himself argues for the primacy of human reason in the theological enquiry in the following way;

"...we can never properly be more certain of the truth of a revealed proposition than of the soundness of our reasons for classifying it as revealed. We cannot claim that the revelation once accepted is self-guaranteeing, for its guarantee is only valid if it is indeed a genuine revelation and whether this is so must first be decided by reason. In short, faith defined as the acceptance on God's authority of propositions which he has revealed, presupposes the two prior convictions [a] that there is a God and [b] that he has made the revelations alleged. And so we are thrown back upon the more fundamental problem of our cognition of the divine Being himself and his revealing activity."

20.

To deny that reason should be the starting point for theological enquiry is to leave believers and prospective believers with no way of judging between truth and untruth, between justified and unjustified assertions of religious faith and between the credible and the incredible, apart from what many would consider to be the highly unsatisfactory means of private or corporate illumination. To assert that human reason must be our starting point and yardstick for discerning religious truth may seem unwarrantably arrogant, but it is preferable to the promotion of some kind of religious supernaturalism that is beyond being reasonably examined and therefore cannot be reasonably justified. Therefore, for all its limitations, human reason must be our only means of reaching an intellectually respectable understanding of theology, and should be the starting point of the enquiry. That reason is the starting point need not and does not predetermine what our theological conclusions will be, although it does presuppose that they are likely to be tentative and open to further revision in the light of increased human knowledge. What we will be looking for

is some meeting point between reason, experience and alleged revelation, where properly considered assent may be given.

3. The Anthropological Approach and its Historical and Cultural Background

It will be apparent, from the above, that the anthropological approach to theology is rooted not only in an acknowledgement of the human character of theological thinking, but in associated ideas of the importance of historical and cultural relativism in the enquiry. It would be no exaggeration to say that the rise of the historical/critical method in relation to the documentary sources of religions, and a general critical consciousness which has emerged since the Enlightenment, have revolutionized attitudes towards religions as grounded in definitive and unchangeable authority. The historical/critical approach involves the acceptance of certain principles of methodology; Troeltsch, perhaps more than anyone else, has outlined the nature and consequences of historical consciousness and the use of the historical method. 21.

Firstly, the principle of criticism predetermines a certain scepticism, which disinclines the individual to accept what he or she is told, but, as far as possible, seeks verification of this against documentary sources and other available evidence. 22. Secondly there is the principle of analogy, which works on the assumption that general characteristics of the present time must also have applied to the past. The interrelatedness of history has been emphasised by Troeltsch.

"...Biblical scholarship has been compelled, bit by bit, of its own accord, to illuminate the beginnings of the religion of Israel by analogies from the religions of other Semitic peoples; to connect the deep original transformation brought about by Yahwistic religion with the general situation in the world of the near East ... and to illuminate the rise of the Christian church by the interaction between earliest Christianity and its setting within the Roman Empire." 23.

Thirdly, the principle of correlation requires that historical reports from a particular time and place must be correlated with others from a similar context and subjected to the same sort of examination. This principle operates on the basis of an acceptance that all events which take place in time are intrinsically interconnected in correlation with each other, and that all events are relative to one another. 24. Once this methodology is accepted it becomes impossible to treat the scriptures of one particular tradition [ie. one's own] as absolutely authoritative and indisputable, whilst critically analysing others.

The ultimate result of such methodology, as far as Christianity is concerned, has been to undermine certainty in what Jesus said, or taught, or even who he actually was. The subject of Christology is one we will examine in much greater detail at a later stage, in relation to Hick's revision of traditional Christological affirmations. At this point, I wish simply to defend the legitimacy of the historical/critical method, while acknowledging its limitations. Contrary to what some theologians seem to be suggesting at the present time, certain limitations are well recognized by historians and form part of the self-understanding of the methodology itself. There is, for example, an explicit recognition within history, that human events, once past, are past and gone. No conscientious modern historian would claim to do more than **reconstruct** events of the past; such reconstructions, being no more than approximations of the events themselves, do not profess to be the totality of the truth of the events. Furthermore, it is recognized that all events of the past are humanly interpreted in two ways. Firstly, they are interpreted by the historian; however objective he or she attempts to be, the historian will inevitably start the enquiry with some presuppositions about what actually took place. Secondly, and more seriously from the point of view of orthodox Christian theology, the historical/critical method recognizes that all documents, including scriptural documents, are conditioned by the age and circumstances in which they were written. They are after all the products of human writers who, at the very least, made some decisions about what was important enough to be written down and what could be left out. The nub of the matter, from the historian's point of view, is that the quality of the historical

reconstruction will depend very much upon the quality and quantity of the documentary evidence available, for it is from this, and nothing else that the historical reconstruction derives.

As we shall see in a later chapter, neither the quality nor the quantity of the documentary evidence relating to the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth is particularly satisfactory from a strictly historical point of view, thereby considerably restricting what can be said, with any certainty, about the historical Jesus. None of this is denied by serious practitioners of the historical/critical method. Historical evidence, taken on its own, could never prove the necessity or otherwise of the Incarnation as an appropriate interpretation of the life of Jesus; it would be beyond the scope of the methodology to do so. What it could do, and arguably ought to do, is to provide a solid substructure of evidence to point to the Incarnation as the only reasonable and complete human interpretation of Jesus' life and work. Whether it actually does so is, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, the subject of continuing debate.

On the other hand, it can scarcely be denied that, historically, there has been in Christianity a belief in, and reliance upon the authenticity of scriptural evidence, which has served to underpin the Church's faith, and has given an absolutely authoritative status to scripture. Hick has noted that the acceptance of historical research in relation to Jesus' self-testimony is a recent development.

"It is worth noting that this is a fairly recent movement within traditional orthodoxy. For some seventeen centuries it was believed that Jesus did claim to be God incarnate, and Fourth Gospel sayings such as such as "I and my Father are one", "He that has seen me hath seen the Father", were treated as historical sayings of Jesus.

Today even conservative [other than fundamentalist] exegetes grant that this cannot be sustained. There has thus been a major shift from believing that Jesus was God because he said so, to

believing it because the New Testament is sometimes close to saying so, to believing it because the Church came to say so". 25.

It is difficult to over-estimate the significance of this shift which, perhaps, is the root cause of a certain defensiveness discernible in the attitudes of some theologians towards the historical/critical method. Loughlin, for example, states that, *"...historical criticism has a limited vocabulary; it is able to describe only certain things and certain aspects of things and divinity is not one of them."* 26.

This, as I have stated, would be accepted by serious historians of religion. Loughlin feels unable, however, to dispense with the historical method, for,

"...it is correct that theology use historical criticism in order to curb possible docetic tendencies as well as to act as a check on Christological affirmation, but not as more than a check, such that Christology is abused by it." 27.

Indeed, it is very far from easy for Christian theology, having grounded itself in the authenticity of its scriptural roots throughout the centuries, to claim in the contemporary period that it can dispense altogether with the historical method, and "float free" from its historical and scriptural origins. But what does Loughlin's idea of a "check on Christological affirmations" amount to? In fact, very little, for on further examination it appears that for Loughlin, historical criticism can only act as a check insofar as it does not undermine his own Christological presuppositions, which rest on the fact that, *"...one is either convinced that the development of the doctrine was providential or one is not."* 28.

This does no more than pay lip service to historical methodology; if it does not support traditional Christology, but, in Loughlin's terminology "abuses it", it is to be rejected. In other words, historical methodology is tantamount to being an "abuse" if it does not find what Loughlin wants it to find. The truth of Loughlin's attitude towards historical criticism is exemplified by the statement, *"...the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is not something that can be seen simply*

by using the tools of historical criticism; it could not be seen then by those who simply looked and stared." 29.

The implication seems to be that historians of religion simply "look and stare"; as stated above, they do not do so, they interpret events, in the consciousness that their reconstructions are always interpretations, and limited to the extent that they are based on such documentary evidence as is available, and on nothing else. But then so do theologians interpret events, on the basis, in this particular case, of their own conditioned thinking, for *"one is either convinced that the development of the doctrine was providential or one is not."* 30.

One cannot help but wonder whether the backlash of criticism towards historical methodology is not in part due to the fact that it has not "produced the goods" some theologians would have liked it to produce, but has, on the contrary, undermined the sense of certainty engendered by the Church on the basis of apparently irrefutable scriptural evidence. Without this, Loughlin is forced into a "miracle of illumination" kind of theology:

"...for theology - as the self-understanding of the Christian faith - must accept, as a truth of the life it serves, that its own knowledge of God is God's self-saying in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Thus it is sufficient theological refutation of Hick's assertion to say that, if God was incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, then that is what God could [and did] do." 31.[Loughlin's emphasis.]

This, ultimately, is a theological assertion, rather than a theological argument, and could only be considered "sufficient theological refutation" within the very narrow confines of a Christian theology which presupposes the unique status of Christian revelation. This understanding of theology is not one to which an anthropological approach would subscribe. More importantly, it is the kind of approach to theology which has been considerably undermined by the historical/critical method, which concerns itself not only with the particularities of specific

historical data, [eg. the New Testament documents] but with the cultural conditioning of revelation in general, and the cultural conditioning of subsequent theological thinking.

As far as revelation is concerned, a reductionist view, acceptable to the anthropological approach to theology, is that revelation is importantly conditioned by the time and place in which it occurred. Revelation takes place within the particularities of history, to particular people and in culturally and historically specific situations, in answer to specific questions it was intended to provide the answers to. Revelation is further conditioned by the understanding and apprehensions of the recipient of the particular revelation, for God can only be apprehensible in so far as He/She/It is relevant to, and can be interpreted by, human beings in their historical situations. 32. In fact the mere possibility of such an occurrence as a revelation is dependent on there being some prior understanding and apprehension, on the part of the recipient, of what might be the characteristics of God, or ultimate reality, otherwise the recipient would be unable to recognize the divinity of the revelation as such. What is true of primary revelation to the great religious figures of history is equally true of all subsequent theological reflection. As Pailin has written, *"...what Ellis, Mansel and Barth found as the revealed "word" seems to readers at later times to have been noticeably influenced by their times."* 33.

This is echoed by Kaufman.

"...As our modern historical knowledge vividly shows us, every theological position has always been taken, and every claim has been made, by some particular, limited, finite, human being, whether named Paul of Tarsus or Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin or Karl Barth. Beliefs about divine inspiration and revelation have all too often enabled theologians in the past to obscure this fact by claiming that this affirmation or position is grounded directly in the very truth of God." 34.

In that it starts from, and acknowledges, the limitations of human thinking, the anthropological approach to theology denies the validity of any such claims, while affirming nevertheless that

theology, as a fundamentally human activity, contains within itself the possibility of reaching towards the ultimate meaning and value which is its referent, and which we in the west call God. It must be conceded from the outset, however, that the acceptance of the relativity of thought cannot exempt these particular reflections, which are likely to be incomplete, tentative and limited by the confines of my own particular historical and intellectual perspective.

4. The Concept of Agnosticism within an Anthropological Framework for Theology

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the anthropological approach to theology affirms an ultimate agnosticism about the nature of God, or that which is ultimately real, but states that this is a genuinely religious insight, shared by the world's religious traditions in their most profound depths of understanding. The kind of agnosticism I am referring to requires some further definition, within the context of a theological approach which relies heavily on historical consciousness. This kind of agnosticism is neither cynical nor destructive, but acknowledges that, in the face of the ultimate mystery of human life and human destiny, theology is a creative but humanly limited attempt to grapple with that which we can never claim to understand fully. Traditional claims to absolute knowledge of God, or claims that certain religious practices and rituals are assured paths to human salvation, constitute an unwarranted and unpardonable human arrogance. As Gordon Kaufman has written,

"...the only possible check against the monumental deceptions which human religiosity works on our gullibility- and on our desire for certainty in a terrifying world- is the constant reminding of ourselves that it is indeed mystery with which we humans ultimately have to do; and therefore we dare not claim to know the right and the true, the good and the real, but must acknowledge that in these things we always proceed in faith, as we move forward through life into the uncertain future before us."

Kaufman's interpretation of the symbolic linguistic construct, "God", as "Ultimate Mystery" creates a useful framework from within which this theological enquiry can proceed. We need to acknowledge that all our theological constructions, including the construction of the concept of God, are products of the human imagination, not in the sense of being "imaginary" or "false" but in the sense of being humanly limited. As human constructions, they must always fall short of what God is, when God is understood as Ultimate Mystery. Our consciousness of the inscrutability of this mystery does not entail, however, that we retreat into nihilism, throwing up our hands in despair in the face of our ultimate inability to know all there is to know about the subject of our enquiry. Awareness of human limitation must be qualified by awareness of human freedom and responsibility to re-orientate and reconstruct values, meanings and purposes for human existence in the highly problematic and complex world in which we live. Historically, the religions have functioned in this way, providing meaningful structures within which men and women have been able to orientate their lives. Theological reconstruction has taken place throughout history [though not always self-consciously] in relation to the changing nature of human societies, for structures which cease to be relevant to the world in which people find themselves, and which fail to make sense of this environment, must ultimately be restructured, or abandoned. As Kaufman argues, compellingly, we are fundamentally historical creatures. 36. In our own historical time we are moving very rapidly towards an awareness that we live in "one world"; we have crossed the threshold of intercultural consciousness. While acknowledging and even celebrating the diversity and particularity of the world's great cultures and religious traditions, we have to view them within a framework of genuine universalism, and our theological enterprise, if it is to be relevant to the world we live in, must reflect this awareness. This, according to Kaufman, is not so much a matter of choice, as of necessity, for,

"...all particular and thus parochial religious and cultural and philosophical traditions are now outmoded and superseded to the extent that cannot give an adequate or illuminating interpretation of our new historical situation, these new sociological facts about human life." 37.

A theological reconstruction, if it is to function to orientate the lives of human beings as they find themselves to be in their own historical time, must approach its task from the perspective of a world view which takes into account the evolutionary character of life on earth, and the development of human history within that evolutionary framework. 38.

John Hick's Epistemology of Religion and the Anthropological Approach to Theology.

1. The Realist view of the Nature of Religious Language

Having made some attempt to outline the parameters of this approach, it is clearly essential to examine Hick's epistemology of religion in detail, in order to determine how far his theology may properly be regarded as "anthropological" in character. Theology, as understood by the anthropological approach, asks, in what ways does a religious perspective provide a rationally coherent understanding of the nature of reality, and how are we to assess its claims to truth? Theology, clearly, concerns itself with "religions" although it is by no means easy to define what is meant by "religion". Well known definitions such as Tillich's idea of "*...the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern*" could encompass a variety of ideologies and religious surrogates, including Marxism, secular humanism or even materialism, for what concerns human beings ultimately could be conceived in terms of human achievement or human prosperity. 39. Within this study, however, "religion" is understood as a form of culture in which human beings ask and attempt to answer the existential question of the meaning of ultimate reality, presupposing that what concerns human beings ultimately has a transcendental dimension beyond the mundane world, towards which they are innately orientated. The existential question, which seeks self-understanding in relation to the divine reality, can be formulated in a number of ways; why are we here? - what is the meaning of life? - what is final human destiny? It is closely related, however, to certain other questions centring on the issue of how we relate to one another, thus the metaphysical aspect of the existential question has a closely related ethical aspect, and it is with this ethical aspect of what are generally known as religions, that we shall eventually concern

ourselves, in an attempt to discern commonality of structure or goal, towards a viable pluralist theology of religions.

For the present, however, our concern is to determine how far this understanding of religion is compatible with Hick's epistemology. At an early stage of his academic career, Hick stated that *"...there is no universally accepted definition of religion, and quite possibly there never will be."* 40.

However, he subsequently proposed a working definition of religion as,

"...an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living within it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute or to a transcendent order or process." 41.

Thus, he distinguished his understanding of religion from that of the naturalist or humanist. However, in his latest seminal work, An Interpretation of Religion - Human Responses to the Transcendent he has broadened his conception of religion by drawing on Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblances. 42. He writes,

"... it is, I think, illuminating to see the different traditions, movements and ideologies whose religious character is either generally agreed or responsibly debated, not as exemplifying a common essence, but as forming a complex continuum of resemblances and differences analogous to those found within a family." 43.

It is now his belief that Tillich's concept of "ultimate concern" is appropriate in that it suggests the ultimate and abiding importance which is attached to religious symbols, rituals and beliefs, by those who count them as religious. 44. However, his stance is unchanged in that he still rejects the naturalistic or non-realist interpretation of religion. This is most easily discerned with reference to his understanding of faith, as the human response to the divine reality. Faith, as a reference to the religious belief and commitment which constitute a person's existential self-understanding, has

a complex structure; the components of faith of a typical religious believer frequently include his or her value commitments, moral principles, ritual performances and formal or informal membership of a community. However, a fundamental component of faith is generally considered to be the assent to certain beliefs about what is actually the case, as well as the following of a way of life compatible with those alleged truth claims. In other words, ordinarily religious faith has a factual element, and the believer gives assent to certain propositions. The claim that religious faith and belief include reference to a mind-independent reality does not, however, enjoy universal assent, even within western theism. Some philosophers and theologians have claimed that this view of faith arises from a false understanding of the nature of religious language. They hold that the grammatical structures and apparent references of talk about God are different from their proper logical character. Within this understanding, "God" is not the name of a mind-independent reality, and talk of God properly refers to values to which the individual gives assent, or functions as a cipher for some preferred course of action. Accordingly, Braithwaite has suggested that the statement "God is love" is to be understood as *"...the expression of an intention to follow an agapeistic way of life."* 45. Cupitt claims that the understanding of religious language engendered by a non-realist approach actually enhances rather than diminishes the value of the religious perspective. His recommendations are,

"...a break with our habitual theological realism, a full internalization of all religious doctrines and themes, and a recognition that it is possible autonomously to adopt religious principles and practices as intrinsically valuable." 46.

The non-realist view of religious faith, as Hick has noted, is rooted in the Feuerbachian understanding of religious language. 47. He commends some insights of contemporary non-realist theologians, in particular, their focus on the intrinsic worth of a growth in the human virtues of love, compassion and justice, and their insistence that the emphasis on such virtues is not exclusively the province of the realist religious world-view, but points, rather, to the autonomy of the moral life. 48. He is in agreement, also, with the non-realist stance in respect of the cultural conditioning of religious belief and practice.

"...The relativity of religion to human cultures is today common knowledge - though like many other aspects of modern knowledge it has had to push its way to general consciousness against the weight of pre-modern dogmas. 49.

However, in other respects, Hick parts company with the non-realists. Firstly, he has, from an early stage in his career, sought to defend the cognitive status of religious language against the attack from logical positivism. 50. He has argued that the non-realist interpretation of religious language is simply not compatible with what religious believers would want to say about their faith, and conflicts with their own understanding of the function of their language.

"...it seems clear to me that such utterances as "God is a very present help in time of trouble," "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth"...entail [in the case of statements] or presuppose [in the case of prayer] that God exists; and it also seems clear to me that normal or typical users of such language have intended this entailment or presupposition... Christian language, as the actual speech of a living community, presupposes the extra-linguistic reality of God." 51.

This remains his belief to the present time;

"...although we cannot look into the minds of the seminal religious figures of the past, or of the body of believers from century to century within the great traditions, it nevertheless seems to me transparently evident that they have normally understood their own and one another's core language in a realist way." 52.

Thus Hick has consistently asserted the cognitive status of religious language, firstly because he believes a non-realist interpretation of this language says more about what some philosophers and theologians want to say of religions, than what religious believers themselves are saying. Secondly, he believes that, for all its apparent emphasis upon the intrinsic values promoted by the religious

world-view, the non-realist conception spells, ultimately, a picture of deep pessimism. This is because, for all but the fortunate few both now and throughout the historical ages, the prospect of fulfilling human potential and attaining the spiritual transformation described by the non-realists, is exceedingly remote, if not entirely unachievable. Without some sort of immortality or continued existence beyond death, affirmed by the world's religious traditions, there is no escaping the unpalatable fact that human suffering, poverty, misery and degradation is the reality of existence for the vast mass of humanity and the only reality towards which they may look forward. Thus Hick has written,

"...if we think of God's love in concrete terms, as a creative purpose seeking an authentically human existence for every individual, we are led to see life in a much larger context than this earth. For on this earth God's loving purpose succeeds only very partially." 53.

More recently he has affirmed his continued belief that the fulfilment of human potential, the "good news" of which the religions speak, is negated by the non-realist interpretation which in reality spells "bad news" for all but the fortunate few.

"...If that potential is ever to be realised - and that it is to be realised is the meaning for human life of the ultimate goodness of the universe - then reality must be structured accordingly. But to believe that it is indeed so structured is to construe religious language in a basically realist way." 54.

Hick is not saying that the non-realist position is necessarily false - it may indeed be the case that the unavoidable destiny of the vast majority of human beings is to live in misery and to die unfulfilled. But he is saying that in its fundamentally pessimistic implications, it fails to depict the authentic religious message of the faith traditions, and is unintentionally elitist. 55. He has been criticized for this statement, in relation to humanism, by Mesle. 56. In reply Hick has stressed that he would not wish to suggest that all non-realists are necessarily approving of, or attempting to justify, the suffering and misery of the human condition. He is in agreement with

Mesle that this would not be true of all humanists, although he believes this criticism may still be applicable to some process theodicy. 57. However, whether or not humanists or others approve of, or deeply regret, the facts of human suffering or misery, does not alter the truth of Hick's observation that such is, manifestly clearly, the lot of the vast mass of humanity. No amount of unequivocal repugnance alters the facts of the case. Without some kind of continued existence beyond death [denied by religious non-realists and humanists alike] it is impossible to see how the religions of the world can be justified in affirming their basically optimistic world-view. It is for this reason, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, that the affirmation of continued life after death is essential to Hick's theology.

As outlined above, it has been Hick's concern, throughout his career, to defend the cognitive status of religious language against the attack of logical positivism. It will be necessary at a later stage to examine his position in this respect, in relation to certain developments in his theology regarding the idea of eschatological verification, for here the charge is that he involves himself in some contradiction. 58. But clearly, it is Hick's basic belief that the central affirmations of religious belief have the logical character of factual assertions which will, ultimately, be shown to be true or false. In theory at least, the factual assertions of religious belief are subject to verification in after-life experience, as illustrated by the well-known "Celestial City" parable. 59. Hick does not reject the propositional basis of religious belief, but his understanding of this takes a nuanced form which we shall now examine.

2. The relationship between Propositional Truth, Experience and Revelation

In the Twentieth Century, there has been a major assault on the idea of propositional truth in religion, not only from those who advance non-cognitive accounts of the nature of religious language, but from those who would wish to emphasize the primacy of a personal, experiential response to religious truth. In support of the latter stance, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has written,

"Truth and falsity are often felt in modern times to be properties or functions of statements or propositions; whereas the present proposal is that much is to be gained by seeing them as rather, or anyway, seeing them also, and primarily, as properties or functions of persons." 60.

In Smith's view, religious belief is not simply a static assent to propositions or doctrines deriving from propositional truth claims, but a dynamic human interaction and involvement with that which is said to be true. Smith's understanding of religious faith places emphasis upon the idea of the fundamental religious disposition which is,

"...an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe, a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension." 61.

Hick is in fundamental agreement with this analysis, which sees faith as a cognitive choice, an uncompelled response to conscious experience. Such an analysis of faith by no means entails abandoning the notion of propositional truth in religious affirmations; in Hick's view, the distinction between propositional and non-propositional truth is not to be seen as an exclusive disjunction, an either/or choice. Religious truth is more than an assent to propositions, but it presupposes a propositional basis. He is in agreement with H.H.Price, who has noted that even a so-called non-propositional view of faith is ultimately dependent on propositional truth. 62. I cannot "believe in" my doctor if I did not also "believe that" he exists, similarly, one cannot "believe in" God, unless one also "believes that" he exists. Faith is still a propositional activity, the propositions arising from within the context of a response to experience.

Although Hick does not reject the propositional basis of religious faith, his account of it as a response through human experience, to divine revelation, has certain implications for his understanding of the nature of revelation itself. For Hick, "revelation" is not a body of truths about God, it is the self-disclosure of God, his intervention in the sphere of man's existence. God

has acted in human history. There is a response, through the mind and feelings, that God has acted decisively and that certain events in history can be viewed as salvific events. [Equally, however, they could be interpreted in a purely historical, non-theistic sense.] Hick, whose theology relies heavily on Kantian epistemology, emphasizes the interpretative nature of all human experience, and holds that the interpretative element cannot be excluded from religious belief. Faith arise from the interaction between God's disclosure and the interpretation of this disclosure by the human recipient; there are strong connotations of trust and confidence, and an emphasis on "belief in" rather than "belief that," [the acceptance of propositions] in Hick's account of the nature of religious belief. Hick confirms his strictly limited understanding of Revelation as authentic knowledge in and of itself when he writes,

"...the uniqueness of the Bible is not due to any unique mode or quality of its writing but to the unique significance of the events of which it is the original documentary expression, which became revelatory through the faith of the biblical writers. As such the bible mediates the same revelation to subsequent generations and is thus itself revelatory in a secondary sense, calling in its own turn for a response of faith." 63.

He has argued, further, that Revelation does not provide access to an understanding or knowledge which transcends our normal processes of rational thinking. It is worth quoting Hick again on this point, since it is of crucial importance to the anthropological understanding of his theology.

"...we can never properly be more certain of the truth of a revealed proposition than of the soundness of our reasons for classifying it as revealed. We cannot claim that the revelation once accepted is self-guaranteeing, for its guarantee is only valid if it is indeed a genuine revelation and whether this is so must first be decided by reason. In short, faith, defined as the acceptance on God's authority of propositions which he has revealed, presupposes the two prior convictions [a] that there is

a God and [b] that he has made the revelations alleged. And so we are thrown back upon the more fundamental problem of our cognition of the divine Being himself and his revealing activity."

64.

If what Hick is saying is true, Revelation cannot be classed as a separate category of knowledge, distinct from reason or experience, for it is in actuality the experience of others passed down through the generations and interpreted by each individual by his or her cognitive act of reason. This is not, as I understand it, an argument which claims that knowledge of God is possible through reason alone, but that reason must always qualify, correct or confirm that which we believe to be revealed, which is revealed through the process of religious experience. Revelation thus falls into the sphere of knowledge which may properly be described as experiential; it is a sub-category of experience, but not a distinct and separate form of authentic knowledge. In practice, allegedly revealed knowledge of the divine is conditioned by the ways of thinking of those who apprehend it. Therefore, Revelation, in and of itself, cannot be used to shore up particular claims for absolute indubitable knowledge of God, for two reasons. Firstly, when viewed as a totality, the revelations of the world's faiths present a scenario of contradiction and mutual exclusivity. Secondly, there is what Hick describes as the religious ambiguity of the universe, which suggests that a naturalistic interpretation of the universe cannot be ruled out on rational grounds. 65. It is to this idea of religious ambiguity, which seems to imply a degree of religious agnosticism, that we now turn, having analyzed what may be properly be defined as Hick's reductionist view of revelation, in conformity with the anthropological approach to theology.

3. The Rationality of Religious Belief

In summary, it would seem that Hick's understanding of the nature of religious faith hinges on the idea of the interpretation of experience. He has written, "...*Faith is the interpretative element within what the religious man reports as his experience of living in the presence of God.*" 66. He

emphasizes that this is an epistemological analysis of the nature of religious faith, rather than an argument for the validity of that faith: *"...the analysis of religious faith as interpretation is not itself a religious or an antireligious but an epistemological doctrine. It can with logical propriety be accepted...both by the theist and the atheist."* 67.

In Hick's view, religious faith is both rational and voluntary, however, the reasonableness of faith does not derive from the possibility of prior demonstration of the existence of God. For Hick, arguments for the existence of God are inconclusive and must necessarily be so, or faith in God would be rendered coercive. Hick holds that the epistemic distance between God and man is the right distance, and has consistently asserted that the universe, as presently accessible to us, *"...is religiously ambiguous in that it is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways."* 68.

Hick believes that assertions of faith themselves rest upon a particular way of experiencing the world. There is he believes, a distinctively religious way of experiencing the world and one's place in it. Equally, there is a non-religious way. 69. Faith itself is to be equated with this interpretative activity. In fact Hick holds that cognition of every kind involves the interpretation of experience; it is worth quoting him at some length on this point, for it forms the cornerstone of his epistemology of religion.

"...The knower-known relationship is in the last analysis sui generis: the mystery of cognition persists at the end of every inquiry - though its persistence does not prevent us from cognizing. We cannot explain, for example, how we are conscious of sensory phenomena as constituting an objective physical environment; we just find ourselves interpreting the data of our experience in this way. We are aware that we live in a real world, though we cannot prove by any logical formula that it is a real world. Likewise we cannot explain how we know ourselves to be responsible beings subject to moral obligations; we just find ourselves interpreting our social experience in this way. We find

ourselves inhabiting an ethically significant universe, though we cannot prove that it is ethically significant by any process of logic. In each case we discover and live in terms of a particular aspect of our environment through an appropriate act of interpretation; and having come to live in terms of it we neither require nor can conceive any further validation of its reality. The same is true of the apprehension of God. The theistic believer cannot explain how he knows the divine presence to be mediated through his human experience. He just finds himself interpreting his experience in this way. He lives in the presence of God, though he is unable to prove by any dialectical process that God exists." 70.

Thus for Hick, belief in God is what he has called a foundational natural belief of a kind that cannot be argued about in rational discourse. 71. Other such fundamental beliefs are, belief in the existence of the external world, the fact that things of the external world will behave as we expect them to behave [ie, the law of causation] and the fundamental belief in certain kinds of moral truth. These, for Hick, are not matters we can argue about in a rational way, we simply do believe, though, in the case of God, our epistemic distance from him makes it possible for us not to believe in his existence if we so choose.

In fact, since Hick fully concedes that it is possible to interpret the world naturalistically as well as theistically, it would seem that belief in God is considerably less "fundamental" than belief in external reality. Belief in God is a disputed matter, whereas despite "Cartesian doubt" all people do believe in external reality. This point has been forcibly made by Swinburne. 72. Hick is not entirely clear on this point of what may or may not be regarded as a "fundamental belief" of this kind, in particular with respect to the idea of the status of ethics in religion and the notion of the moral autonomy. In 1970 he outlined an argument for the rationality of belief in God based on the facts of moral obligation, which he called "*a fatal challenge to humanist philosophy*". 73. However, he has since acknowledged that belief in objective morality is not entirely inconsistent with a naturalistic interpretation of the universe. 74. We shall examine Hick's moral argument for

rational theistic belief, and the inconsistencies which may be discerned in the light of his later thinking, in the next section. At present, it is my concern to examine in more detail what may be regarded as the cornerstone of his defence of the rationality of a religious interpretation of the universe; that is, the rationality of religious belief as grounded in experience.

4. Rational Religious Belief grounded in Religious Experience

It is Hick's basic contention that religious belief is grounded in experience, however, as we have seen, he also believes that the universe as we presently experience it is religiously ambiguous and can be interpreted by the rational human subject in both naturalistic and religious ways.

"...the universe maintains its inscrutable ambiguity. In some aspects it invites whilst in others it repels a religious response. It permits both a religious and a naturalistic faith, but haunted in each case by a contrary possibility that can never be exorcised. Any realistic analysis of religious belief and experience, and any realistic defence of the rationality of religious conviction, must therefore start from this situation of systematic ambiguity." 75.

Hick's theology asserts the rationality of religious belief as grounded in experience, and yet also concedes the possibility that this experience may be mistaken; it is characterized by an affirmation of the veridical nature of religious experience and an equal acknowledgement of agnosticism as an insight which is central to the religious as well as the non-religious disposition. How does he synthesize these seemingly contradictory ideas, while ultimately rejecting a naturalistic interpretation of the universe? Hick has posed the question in terms of a synthesis of rationalist and empiricist approaches. Given his contention that arguments for the existence of God are inconclusive, his question centres upon the rationality of religious belief; is it reasonable for the individual to believe in his or her apprehensions of God, on the basis of experience? 76. This, Hick clearly states, is not an argument for divine existence, based on experience. The proposition, "that God exists," may be true or false, we have no way of knowing unequivocally.

The rationality of belief in a certain proposition is not determined by the truth or falsity of that proposition; Hick's referent is to the rationality of belief rather than to the truth or falsity of the belief itself. Citing Pascal, it remains his contention that,

"...the justification of theistic belief does not consist in an argument moving directly to the conclusion that God exists but rather in an argument for the rationality of so believing despite the fact that this cannot be proven or shown to be in any objective sense more probable than not." 77.

Hick's contention is that, given the testimony of certain persons, particularly the great religious leaders Jesus, Muhammad, Ramanuja or Guru Nanak, to have experienced their lives as lived in the presence of God, it is perfectly rational for them to believe in the reality of God;

"...for unless we trust our own experience we can have no reason to believe anything about the nature, or indeed the existence of the universe in which we find ourselves. We are so made that we live, and can only live, on the basis of our experience and on the assumption that it is generally cognitive [though perhaps in complexly mediated ways] of reality transcending our own consciousness." 78.

Hick is of course perfectly aware that western philosophy, from the time of Descartes, has been unable to prove the existence of external reality, but as has been stated, for him, as for many philosophers, the existence of the external world as perceived by our senses is something we simply have to believe, not to do so would be entirely irrational. For Hick, the existence of external reality is a "foundational natural belief." Proceeding from this point, Hick concludes that the same must be true of first-hand religious experiences of a revelatory character; unless there is good reason to doubt the veridical nature of such an experience, the recipient is justified in believing it, indeed it would be irrational not to do so.

Here, Hick is very much in agreement with Penelhum's Parity Argument, and with Swinburne's argument based on the "principle of credulity." 79. Swinburne developed this argument, based on

the principle that, ordinarily, what seems to be there is there, to an argument based on a "principle of testimony", that, ordinarily, people tell the truth. Were this not so, we would be unable to rely on the veridical nature of the most commonplace assertions of factual knowledge. The individual cannot experience everything there is to be experienced; the totality of human knowledge is based upon the general reliability of the testimony of others. Thus, not only is the recipient of religious experience justified in believing it, others are also justified, on the basis of his or her testimony, unless it can be shown that the believer has a tendency to make unlikely assertions, or is deficient in the most ordinary perceptions, or is a consummate liar. Most claims for revelatory experience by no means comply with these grounds for scepticism. The Old Testament prophets, Jesus and the apostles were persons who seemed more perceptive than their contemporaries, more aware of the problems confronting humanity. Mohammed was an exceptional leader and statesman. 80. These arguments shore up what is, for Hick, a convincing analysis of the rationality of belief in God on the basis of experience. Clearly, however, this analysis does not commit Hick to a specifically Christian account of religious belief, for he cites as examples of the "great mahatmas" leaders from a variety of world faiths. Thus, his construction of rational theistic belief is pluralist in conception and does not restrict him to the traditional Christian approach to Revelation which commits the believer to the acceptance of certain propositions about God within the framework of Christian Scripture and ecclesiology, not to all and every proposition.

In agreement with Hick, I would argue that, given the premise that we are justified in believing the veridical nature of primary religious experience to exceptional historical persons, we can have no grounds in experience for being selective about those testimonies of revelatory experience we will believe and those we will not believe. Certainly, the religious tradition we belong to frequently requires us to be selective. We will probably find that our particular faith tradition requires us to believe that certain persons - not all - have received knowledge of God through revelation and that this is affirmed in scripture. Taking a broader view, that revelation occurs outside Christian Scripture, we may believe that others have misinterpreted their revelations. But

we cannot say we have knowledge gained through experience, which allows us to refute the revelations of others. Experience itself does not allow us to refute the first-hand experiences of others on the grounds that their experiences do not conform to what we think they ought to be, precisely because we have not had these experiences. This point has been forcibly made by Hume;

"... we cut the ground from under our own feet, and invite the sceptics' response if we are selective in our acceptance of the first-hand experience of revelation of others, accepting for example, the revelation in Jesus Christ but not that of Gautama the Buddha, or Muhammad. 81.

The point that we cannot argue on the basis of experience for the untruth of the religious experience of others because we have not had those experiences, must be further developed, and defended, particularly in relation to those whose views might be held to be especially inimical to the anthropological approach to theology; there might be a wide range of such opposing views, from atheists to Barthians. It is my contention that the content of religious experience can only be known and authenticated by the individual whose experience it actually is. It cannot be evaluated in its entirety by anyone else. The same must be true of all experience, which may be illustrated by means of analogy with other, more mundane experiences. I cannot, on the basis of my own experience of a caring and fulfilling experience teaching in a school with a religious foundation, argue that state schools are, definitively, uncaring or unfulfilling. I cannot, on the basis of a healthy life in a temperate climate, reason that life in the tropics is invariably unhealthy. This is not, of course, a denial of the truth of my own experience, but an acknowledgement of its limitations to me personally. As far as the experience of others is concerned, I am reliant on their testimony as regards the authenticity of this experience, through what Swinburne has called the principle of testimony.

But, as Swinburne has pointed out, a great deal of knowledge is ordinarily derived in this way, since individual experience is necessarily limited. I do not, if I wish to travel to Watford, take out a compass and find that by travelling north I "discover" Watford. I rely on a map, and trust to the previous "discovery" and reliability of the testimony of others. The truth of this testimony would,

of course, be negated if I were to discover, through my own experience, that the map was unreliable, but of course, this is rarely, if ever, the case. How might this analogy be applicable to religious experience? Must one therefore, believe indiscriminately in the testimony of others, regardless of the nature of their beliefs, or even if their description of experience flatly contradicts one's own?

The human analogy may help to illustrate this point further. Suppose an individual were to tell me, on the basis of his or her experience, that they found my husband to be evil and dishonest, whereas my experience of him was that he was good and truthful. Such a flagrant contradiction in experience must imply that one of us was mistaken, we could not both be right. [The flaw in the analogy is its asymmetry; in this case one must suppose that one of us would have greater knowledge and experience of the matter than the other, which cannot be presupposed in the case of religious experience.] However, if my partner in dialogue were to affirm that my husband seemed to be shy and introverted, whereas I had always found him to be socially adept and an extrovert, this would not necessarily imply a flat contradiction, but simply that persons may in their human complexity, exhibit a variety of behavioural patterns which may lead them to be viewed in a variety of ways by different individuals.

How might this relate to religious experience? I would suggest that in the case of conflicting testimonies of religious experience, we are rarely, if ever, confronted with testimonies of flagrant contradiction, one faith contending that God is good and merciful, while another sees Him/Her/It as evil or punitive. [The kinds of conflicts in religious truth claims which do occur, will be the subject of later examination.] We are of course confronted with testimonies which suggest that God, or Ultimate Reality is conceived very differently, as in the basic disagreement between world faiths, that God is personal or impersonal. I would argue however, that this does not constitute the kind contradiction which must necessarily negate the experience of one or another individual, but points, rather, to the variety and diversity of human conceptions of the divine reality. Analogously, it is akin to the fact that my husband may be introvert in some situations and extrovert in others,

but does not constitute the kind of contradiction which would exist if it were asserted that he was both good and evil or honest and dishonest.

The idea of the variety and diversity of human conceptions of the divine reality is in conformity with Hick's belief that the totality of human experience suggests that God has revealed himself partially, in a variety of ways and at a variety of times. 82. The pluralist stance is that, *"the great world traditions constitute different conceptions and perceptions of and responses to, the Real from within the different cultural ways of being human."* 83. Further, Hick confirms his own belief that we cannot rationally be justified in asserting the veridical nature of our own religious experience, while denying that of others;

"...the kind of rational justification...for treating one's own form of religious experience as a cognitive response- though always a complexly conditioned one - to a divine reality must... apply equally to the religious experience of others. In acknowledging this we are applying the intellectual Golden Rule of granting to others a premise which we rely on ourselves...let us avoid the implausibly arbitrary dogma that religious experience is all delusory with the single exception of the particular form enjoyed by the one who is speaking." 84.

What, however, of the atheist who negates the totality of religious experience on the grounds that experience simply does not lead him or her to interpret the world religiously? Must not the individual who experiences the world religiously [and is entitled to believe in the truth of this experience,] reject this position unequivocally, as being mistaken? I would argue that, given the premises of the argument above, and the facts of the religious ambiguity of the universe, it is not reasonable to deny the validity of the atheistic experience. Given the primacy attached to the idea of the authenticity of experience, this must be applied to a non-religious as well as religious interpretation of the universe. One may suspect that, if experience itself involves an act of cognitive choice, in freedom, of interpreting the world religiously, the individual may have freely chosen to reject a religious interpretation of experience. One may suspect, perhaps on the basis

of knowledge of the individual's character, that he or she has not sufficiently analyzed or plumbed the depths of experience. What one cannot do is to assert that the non-religious experience could not be true. What is probably more common than committed atheism, is a degree of agnosticism which may be religious in character, what Hick has described as,

"the ordinary believer who does at least have some remote echo or analogue within his or her own experience of the more momentous experience of the great religious figures... One's belief is not as deeply or solidly grounded as theirs. But I would suggest that it is well enough grounded for it to be reasonable to proceed in faith in the footsteps of a great religious leader, anticipating the full confirmation which our faith will ultimately receive if it does indeed correspond with reality." 85.

Equally, an approach that accords primacy to authentic religious experience requires that it is not possible to refute, absolutely, the experience of a Barthian who might claim that he or she experiences God in a direct unmediated way. The principle of taking seriously the religious experience of others does not exclude those others whose religious experience seems directly opposed to one's own, or denies the validity of one's own. What to the Barthian seems a direct unmediated experience of God, is, in very real terms, just such an experience. What one might suggest, however, is that such individuals have failed to take into sufficient account [or into account at all] the anthropological conditioning of their own theological thinking. Given that the anthropological approach to theology acknowledges the significance of its own conditioning in this way, it can, with propriety make just such a suggestion.

In the case of Barthian theology, there is good reason to believe that, despite its monumental achievements, it is to be interpreted within the context of the reaction against pre-1914 "liberal" sympathy with the Kaiser's war policy, and the subsequent corruption of Christianity associated with the rise of Nazism. 86. Against this background, Barth's reactionary focus upon the preaching of the "unsullied" gospel of Jesus is explicable, but, nevertheless, clearly historically and culturally conditioned. What the anthropological approach to theology attempts to do, in the case of

conflicting and contradictory testimonies of religious experience, is to acknowledge the primacy of individual experience while viewing it within the context of the totality of human experience through projective methods which are in fact the denial of solipsism.

5. The Relationship between Religious Experience and the Concept of Revelation

Given that the anthropological approach to theology involves an acceptance of the veridical nature of authentic religious experience, how far are we justified in accepting Hick's view that the totality of religious experience constitutes good grounds for a religious interpretation of the universe? As we have seen, Hick draws an analogy between the experiences of great leaders such as Jesus and Muhammad, and the ordinary believer's experience which is, he admits, generally a far less intense awareness of living in the presence of the divine. Hick recognizes that there is a distinct difference between the momentous religious experiences of the great leaders, and the ordinary believer's experience, which is more mundane, less dramatic and thus less solidly founded. 87. Nevertheless, he believes there is sufficient analogue between the experience of the ordinary believer and the experience of the great religious leader for the former to feel justified in following in the footsteps of the latter, [of whatever religious persuasion.] 88.

It is possible however, that he overstretches the analogy, minimizing the difference between what Troeltsch called "productive" and "reproductive" revelation. 89. Generally, the experience of the ordinary believer is "reproductive", deriving from the first-hand experience of the great religious leaders, prophets, apostles and saints. Even the original "productive" revelation of such persons is received within a particular cultural and historical context and is therefore open to interpretation. For Troeltsch, and for Hick, the definition of revelation is experiential- what Troeltsch called the "inner sensing and certainty" of God- and thus the terms "religious experience" and "revelation" can be used interchangeably. Conceptually, however, the idea of "revelation", outside of a specifically religious context of language usage, does have connotations of active participation and first-hand involvement. An example will illustrate this. If, for example, a jewel in a casket is

shown to me, a revelation has taken place, something has been disclosed which was previously hidden. If, on the other hand, I am simply told there is such a jewel, I am dependent on the truth of the teller, that such a jewel actually exists. [I am in fact dependent on what Swinburne called the principle of testimony.] However, if I have not actively participated in the disclosure, can it be claimed that something that can properly be called "a revelation" has taken place? The suggestion I am making is simply that it is questionable whether experience confirms that the religious beliefs of individuals are necessarily obtained by means of "revelation." Conceptually, the word may be misapplied to the means by which the ordinary believer obtains his or her faith. Most of us would concede that our religious beliefs are, at least initially, obtained through reception, rather than through revelation, through "being told" [testimony] rather than through first-hand experience. Initially, this must necessarily be the case, unless God is in the business of providing revelatory experience to infants! We are received into the Church, through baptism in the case of Christianity, and are told the truths of our religion in our most receptive years. This "received knowledge" is generally speaking, extremely effective in its impact upon the religious beliefs of the human individual. This is why Hick himself is able to note,

"...if I had been born in India I would probably be a Hindu, if in Egypt, probably a Muslim, if in Ceylon probably a Buddhist; but I was born in England and am, predictably, a Christian." 90.

"Revelation," is thus obtained, so to speak, vicariously; it is dependent on the previous first-hand experience of others and is very much a matter of being received into a particular historically and culturally conditioned tradition. Of course, Christians, perhaps conceding the great significance of the accident of birth, may nevertheless claim that, having been received into, accepted and interiorized the truths of Christianity, and having tried to live by its tenets, they have found them to be true. Thus, by their own experience, not just the experience of others, they know Christianity to be true. The problem, here, is that similar claims can be made, and are made, by adherents of other faiths. This would support Hick's pluralist position of there being a general and partial revelation to all world faiths - if it is possible to accept that the idea of "revelation" is appropriately used, in such instances.

It may be that it is possible to accept this idea of revelation, as being genuinely experiential, provided that the correlating idea of the thoroughly anthropological character of all human belief is equally accepted. It could be argued that there can be no such thing as "unconditioned experience." The great religious leaders, Jesus and Muhammad, received their experiences of God within specific historically and culturally conditioned religious contexts. Jesus was, after all, a member of a typical First Century Jewish Palestinian family. But it would be impossible for Jesus, or for anyone else, to receive knowledge of God in a historically and culturally "neutral" context, for no such thing can be deemed to exist. Moses, when he saw the burning bush and interpreted his experience as a sign from God, must have had some prior apprehension of God, in order to have made such an interpretation. The same must apply to any individual, in any time or place, in relation to their interpretation of experience. Taking this into account, it would seem that the experience of the present-day believer cannot "float free" from Scripture; Revelation does not exist in a vacuum and cannot derive from nowhere, for all human knowledge exists within a particular historical and cultural context. Troeltsch, while emphasising a personal, individual and experiential understanding of "revelation", nevertheless made the point that;

"...Revelation always requires some kind of documentation where the revelation can be known in classical and normative form...This documentation- however much freedom may be possible in its interpretation and the elaboration of its implications- still constitutes the authority that religion cannot do without, either for the formation of its community or for the conviction that its idea is to be recognized as valid truth." 91.

Given these insights, it would seem that Hick's stance on the rationality of religious belief based on the experiences of the great religious leaders is viable. It remains the case, however, that the rationality of such belief can only be acceptable from within a pluralist framework. Hick is in agreement with Cantwell Smith in his view that it is inappropriate to view particular "religions" as mutually exclusive entities; such views have developed, in error, since the Seventeenth Century, and are peculiarly the product of the western mind. 92. Man is "homo religioso"; it is possible

to see the religious life of humankind as a vast dynamic continuum, rather than as a set of mutually exclusive belief systems. It may well be that the separation of the "purely religious" from the historical/cultural context is a false device, for it is clear, according to Smith, that world faiths have, in their development, been shaped by historical and cultural conditions. Here, Hick would be in agreement;

"...The different religions are different streams of religious experience, each having started at a different point in human history and each having formed its own conceptual self-consciousness within a different cultural milieu." 93.

Conceived in this way, world faiths should not be viewed as rival ideological communities, and it is inappropriate to speak of "a religion" as being true or false. Each tradition provides a context in which the individual may experience himself or herself as being in the presence of the divine;

"...each of the great traditions constitutes a context and, so far as human judgement can at present discern, a more or less equally effective context, for the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness." 94.

Thus, Hick argues, convincingly, that empiricism confirms that the rationality of belief in God, based on revelation as an aspect of religious experience, can only be viable and coherent from within a pluralist framework. This is because only pluralism takes each experience seriously on its own terms and confirms the validity of all authentic religious experience.

It must be conceded, however, that this theological model of religious belief involves a considerable reduction of what is generally meant by the notion of revelation. There is an explicit acknowledgement that revelation cannot be conceived as direct, divine communication to humanity. Revelation does not provide access to an understanding or knowledge of God which transcends our normal processes of rational thinking; reason interprets experience and allows us to make judgements regarding the authenticity of that which is alleged as revealed. In practice, allegedly revealed knowledge of the divine is conditioned by the ways of thinking of those who apprehend

it. Therefore, the concept of revelation should not be used in an attempt to shore up particular claims for absolute, indubitable knowledge of God.

6. Hick's Epistemology of Religion in Relation to Moral Awareness of God: a Developing Philosophy

Hick's understanding of the nature of revelation and religious belief based on experience, as outlined above, would seem to suggest that knowledge of God can be conceived in terms of an innate awareness of the Divine, an intrinsic "God consciousness" that is historically and culturally conditioned by the context in which it is received. His empirical approach to the nature of religious belief has however, been linked with a further argument, based on a rationalist approach to the nature of faith and knowledge, expounded in terms of a reformulation of a moral argument which, he has stated, challenges a purely naturalistic interpretation of human existence. 95. The intrinsic link is discernible by means of reformulating Hick's insights concerning religious experience in terms of a question, "from whence did Moses, or Jesus, or Muhammad [or "homo religioso", from the dawn of time] receive their apprehensions of God? Is there, one may ask, a "first cause" of God-consciousness that is realized experientially but can be differentiated from experience itself? In reformulating a moral argument for the rationality of theistic belief, Hick has drawn on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, regarding the nature of faith. Since Kantian epistemology underpins a great deal of Hick's philosophical theology and provides a grounding for his "Copernican Revolution", which was initially the hallmark of his religious pluralism, it will be necessary, at this point, to enter into Kantian philosophy in some detail. This is not to say that it will be possible, or even necessary, to examine every aspect of Kantian philosophy and the many diverse interpretations of it; such a task would clearly be beyond the scope of this thesis. I shall however examine Kant's philosophy in so far as it is important in highlighting a crucial aspect of Hick's theology.



Immanuel Kant [1724-1804] believed that it was impossible to have knowledge of God; his concern was with the conditions of the possibility of human knowledge, but knowledge, he believed, could not transcend the world of experience. Kant said; *"I call all knowledge that is concerned not with objects, but with our way of knowing objects in so far as these are possible, "a priori" transcendental."* 96. Here, Kant is using the term "transcendental" in a different way from its application to God, he is referring to the relationship between the "thing known" and the active participation of the knowing subject. Kant's theory, applied to the idea of the objective reality of time and space, distinguishes between the entity as it is in itself, and the entity as it appears to human perception. He recognizes the importance played by the cognizing set of the human mind in its perception of "what is." Thus, whatever the individual observes, he or she makes a connection between it, and certain previously existing structures of his or her capacity to know, for only in this way can judgements be made. For Kant, "an object," in our experience, is the phenomenal form of that object, it is not the object "as it is in itself," detached from human perception of it. His contention was that knowledge is the product of the interaction of reason upon experience, thus he synthesized the approaches of the rationalist and the empiricist.

However, Kant specifically limited human knowledge to the phenomenal world which it is possible for us to experience, and, for him, this excluded God. The judgements made "a priori" by humans, upon the phenomenal world are "transcendental" in that they transcend the experiential world itself. For Kant, this was as far as any metaphysical discussion could go. He believed it was not possible to discuss, meaningfully, God, the Angels, the "First Cause," etc. for knowledge is only obtainable in the sphere of "possible experience," and God, the "First Cause," etc. fall outside this sphere. 97. Kant did not dispute the existence of God, explicitly, but he disputed the possibility of human knowledge of him. The fact that people cannot, strictly speaking "know" God, does not mean that they are not entitled to believe in him, however. For Kant, belief in God is a postulate of practical reason; God is an object of faith that transcends knowledge, "knowledge is denied, in order to make room for faith." 98. For Kant the essence of religion is morality; he called this "pure religion," which is apprehended by faith rather than by knowledge. Morality

requires and in fact validates the existence of God, for the ultimate object of good will, the "summum bonum," or perfect state of affairs, cannot be brought about by human will. It is within the power of human beings to become good wills, through the claim of universal moral principles upon them. But the totality of the "summum bonum", which encapsulates the element of proportioning happiness to just deserts, is beyond the power of humans to achieve. God is a postulate of the claim of morality upon us and of the reality of the second element of the "summum bonum."

Thus Kant speaks of "natural religion," which is in accordance with the intrinsic nature of men and women as rational beings. All alleged "special revelation" within the ecclesiastical faiths has to be judged in terms of how far it conforms to, and enhances, the idea of "pure religion." Pure religious faith does not in any way depend on contingent historical events; *"...true religion consists not in knowing or considering what God has done for our salvation, but in what we must do to become worthy of it."* 99. Thus, Kant's account of religion entails that a plurality of phenomenal world faiths may serve as vehicles for faith in God, [or, equally, they may fail to do so.]

Despite what seems to be Kant's claim that the divine existence is a presupposition of the claims of morality upon us, it is nevertheless not easy to determine the precise status of religion in relation to morality, in his thinking. In one sense he seems to be saying that the existence of ethical ideals and moral obligations entails that we postulate a divine existence as their source or ground, but in another he seems to be suggesting that morality is autonomous. Morality could be viewed as autonomous within Kant's thinking because he seems to see it as based upon a universal and rational aspect of human nature which is encapsulated in the idea of the "categorical imperative." The consciousness that one ought to do something, regardless of one's preferences or desires, constitutes an absolute claim that is grounded in universal, rational and unrestrictedly valid principles. But the categorical ought need not be, in itself, a specifically religious insight, but simply the expression of a highly developed feature of human nature as it exists among humans as naturally gregarious creatures.

The difficulties in uncovering the inner logic of morality have been classically expressed in Plato's "Euthyphro"; *"Is what is holy, holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?"* 100. Presented as an exclusive disjunction, an either/or choice, the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro is not intended to provide an answer to this question, but to uncover certain misapprehensions held by Euthyphro [and us] about the nature of religious and moral beliefs, and to draw his attention [and ours] to the difficulties of the relationship between them. The problem consists of this; if what is good is good because God commands it, then it is only contingently good, and dependent on God's will. Even if God is viewed in Kantian terms as the agent of the perfect state of affairs or "summum bonum", morality is still dependent on the will of this agency, therefore the notion of intrinsic human morality becomes redundant. On the other hand, the insistent prompting of moral consciousness, that cruelty is intrinsically evil, while loving kindness, justice and compassion are intrinsically good, seem so much part of human experience as to incline us to the belief that morality is autonomous and can be defined independently of God. This belief is further reinforced by the examples of good atheists and humanists who appear not to need religious mores as either a cause of, or reason for, the goodness of their actions. If morality is autonomous, even the goodness of God can be measured and evaluated by the yardstick of moral rules that hold good in themselves, indeed, moral norms and values can inform and correct religious norms and values. But if this is the case it cannot be true that morality is rooted in God, and it becomes impossible to argue from the existence of morality as intrinsic to human nature, to God as the cause of that moral consciousness.

Kant's exposition of the inner logic of morality does not seem to provide an unequivocal answer to the question of its nature in relation to religious belief. Nor, I believe, does Hick's philosophy of religious belief, and it is in this sphere that his thinking has undergone a considerable shift. Hick, drawing on Kant's insights, has presented a reformulated moral argument as a "fatal challenge to humanist philosophy" rather than an argument for divine existence based on the moral experience of humanity. 101. He used the illustration- which he admitted to be extreme one- of a humanist knowingly sacrificing his life, not for another individual, or for family community or country, but for a moral principle. [He did not ask whether, in fact, humanists actually do so more

frequently than religious believers, or what might motivate such a humanist, but simply suggested that such an instance of self-sacrifice could conceivably occur.] However, were it to occur the humanist must, according to Hick, be deemed to be acting irrationally, his action could not be justified by his creed. 102. This is because humanist philosophy entails that the human organism, after living for seven or eight decades, is bound for eternal extinction. No moral action that is based solely on a principle can override the instinct for self-preservation, for no moral principle, for the humanist, can be what Kant called a "categorical imperative." Such an act of moral altruism, for no-one in particular but for humanity at large, would involve the humanist in a profound contradiction, for humanism argues that there are no moral absolutes. 103. If the humanist's action is not to be considered irrational, this implies the existence of moral objectivity which is a postulate of the existence of God.

As stated above, Hick's reformulated moral argument was not presented as an argument for divine existence based on the moral experience of human beings, but rather, as a challenge to humanist philosophy. Its conclusions were appropriately tentative;

"...to follow out the implications of our own moral insights is to raise a question to which the answer may be - God. Is the mortal self-sacrifice for the good of humanity, which our moral nature prompts us to salute, rational or irrational? If the naturalistic picture of the universe is correct, such action is irrational and can only occur because men are not in the last resort able to assert their reason against the power of nurture, internalised as conscience. But if on the other hand we trust our conscience, believing it to be rational so to do, then we ought to disavow the naturalistic picture and move in a direction which might in the end lead to belief in God." 104.

Tentative as were the conclusions of Hick's argument, it is nevertheless the case that his beliefs regarding the religious status of ethics have undergone a considerable change during the course

of his academic career. It remains his stance that, from a religious perspective, it is still possible to view morality as a function of our human nature, which is grounded in the divine creation. 105. However, morality may equally be viewed as an aspect of the structure of human nature which is capable of being incorporated into a naturalistic world-view, as simply a distinctive phenomenon of that structure.

"...On either view it is the aspect of our nature which generates the invisible dimension of moral value. This dimension is hospitable to a religious interpretation; but it is nevertheless not incompatible with a non-religious interpretation." 106.

Hick is no longer inclined to argue, as he did previously, from morality to God as an epistemological doctrine for the rationality of religious belief. This is not to say that he has ceased to consider the relationship between religious beliefs and morality in the sphere of religious pluralism, for, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter, one of the criteria he has used for evaluating religious traditions as they have existed in their historical situations is a moral criterion. 107. And it remains the case that Hick's argument for the discernment of common ground among world faiths in support of the pluralist hypothesis, is rooted in his belief in the existence of a "Golden Rule", that *"...love, compassion, generous concern for and commitment to the welfare of others is a central ideal for each of them."* 108. He does not however, distance himself from the notion that, equally, this common ground may be shared by humanists and others who may hold non-realist views of religions.

Ultimately, it will be my concern to argue that the fact that morality is not exclusive to the religious world view does not negate its usefulness to world faiths as an area of common ground and possible agreement - if such commonality may be discerned. Before doing so, it will be necessary to attempt to establish the truth of moral realism, for a pluralist hypothesis which argues on the basis of common ethical criteria among world faiths presupposes the kind of objective morality which has been much disputed in recent times. Humanist philosophy presents the challenge that moral values, like religious values, are determined by historical, cultural and social conditioning. 109. Since the pluralist approach to world faiths concedes that religious truths

are not absolutes, but are partial and incomplete and have been shaped by historical and cultural conditioning, might not the same be argued for moral truths? Even if the truth of objective morality can be established, it will be necessary to attempt to move from this, to an examination of what the content of such morality might be; Hick promotes the hypothesis that there may be a common ethical ideal but does not attempt a detailed examination of the possible content of this. Such issues must be examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

In agreement with Hick's present view of the status of morality and its relationship with religious belief, it seems to me that, if it is presupposed that moral knowledge is innate to the structure of human nature, it must be regarded as autonomous and based on a "universal categorical", which precludes its exclusivity to the religious world-view. To argue otherwise is to refute what experience confirms, that moral values, at least in theory and at least sometimes, are equally upheld by those who do not affirm a religious interpretation of experience. Thus, also in agreement with Hick's more recent views, it becomes impossible to argue from morality to God as part of an epistemological doctrine for the rationality of religious realism, for moral knowledge seems to exist without such a religious interpretation of experience. We are therefore thrown back upon the empiricist approach, rooted in the validity of religious experience, in support of a religious interpretation of the universe, and it is in this sphere that our enquiries will be centred initially.

The suggestion I wish to explore initially is that theologians who adopt an exclusivist or inclusivist stance in relation to world faiths are themselves involved in some kind of contradiction. Many of them concede the philosophical insights which are essential to Hick's theology, which involve an acknowledgement of the validity of human religious experience through some kind of general revelation. The most cursory survey of the views of theologians regarding revelation, reveals that those who adopt a more open-ended approach, which allows revelation to be genuinely experiential, and personally interpreted, do so, paradoxically, by means of recognizing an "a priori" element in human nature. They subscribe to the belief that there is, in men and women, an innate "God-awareness." Paul Tillich has called this "Ultimate Concern."

"...our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not being, not in the sense of our physical existence but in the sense of ... the reality, the structure, the meaning and the aim of existence." 110.

Karl Rahner writes of the "transcendental nature" of man, that man is orientated towards the "absolute mystery", which is God; *"at this point theology and anthropology necessarily become one."* 111.

For Hans Küng, belief in God is the belief that provides an ultimate reason, support and meaning for reality as a whole, for humans themselves are characterized by, *"...a fundamental trust...in reality as in principle meaningful, valuable, actual, in spite of its uncertainties and ambiguities."* 112.

Chapter 2, therefore, will be concerned with an examination of exclusivist and inclusivist theology in relation to these ideas, for it is possible that the exclusivist and inclusivist stance in relation to world faiths may be inconsistent with philosophical insights regarding faith, knowledge and general revelation, which they themselves accept. What I seek to examine is the tension which arises between the concessions made by some exclusivist and inclusivist theologians to the idea of there being a "general revelation," as a referent to the Divine will and purpose, and the theological positions they adopt.

CHAPTER 1 NOTES.

1. Aquinas. Summa Theologiae. Vol 12. ed. T.Gilby. London. Blackfriars and Eyre and Spottiswode. 1968. Part 1. Question 2.
2. Sankara. The Vedanta Sutrās. trans. G.Thibaut, in M.Muller. [ed.] Sacred Books of the East. O.U.P. [1879-1910.] quoted in K.Ward. "Imperialism and co-existence in religious ideology" in ed. I.Hamnett. Religious Pluralism and Unbelief. Studies Critical and Comparative. London. Routledge. 1990.
3. For a full examination of the conditioning of theological thinking see D.A.Pailin. The Anthropological Character of Theology. Conditioning Theological Understanding. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1990.
4. Exclusivist theologians such as K.Barth and T.Torrance take the view that, by means of God's Biblical Revelation, knowledge of him is absolute and beyond conditioning. See K.Barth. Church Dogmatics. Vol.1. p. 12. Edinburgh. T.& T.Clark. 1936-69. and T.Torrance. Theological Science. Oxford. O.U.P. 1969. p. 26.
5. For example, P.Tillich is considered by A.Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, [1983] to be a pluralist, but G. D'Costa, Theology and Religious Pluralism. [1986] and P. Knitter, No Other Name - A Critical survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions. [1985] would not be in agreement with this analysis of Tillich's theology.
6. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent. London. Macmillan. 1989. p.1. It must be made clear that, in stating that this thesis is compatible with Hick's work in respect of being "a religious interpretation of religion" is not to state that it bears comparison in any other respect with a major publication that must be considered a seminal work, the culmination a lifetime of scholarly theological research.!
7. J. Hick. The Metaphor of God Incarnate. London. S.C.M. 1993. p.6.
8. L.Feuerbach. The Essence of Christianity. [1841]. (trans.G.Eliot). New York. Harper and Brothers. 1957. pp.12-13.
9. K.Barth. Church Dogmatics.1/2. (trans. G.T.Thomson & H.Knight). Edinburgh. T.&T.Clark. Edinburgh. 1956. pp.5ff.

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16. ibid.
17. T.Torrance. Theological Science. Oxford. O.U.P. 1969. p.9.
18. For an important argument on these lines, see D.A.Pailin. The Anthropological Character of Theology. Conditioning Theological Understanding. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1990.
19. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. London. Macmillan. 1985. pp.72-73.
20. J.Hick. Faith and Knowledge. London. Macmillan. 1967. p.xv.
21. E.Troeltsch. "Uber historich und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," *Gesammelte Schriften* 2, Tübingen. 1913. pp. 729-53. This important article, never translated in to English, is cited by K.Ward, in "Imperialism and Co-existence in religious ideology," in ed. I.Hamnett. Religious Pluralism and Unbelief. Studies Critical and Comparative. London. Routledge. London. 1990. p.20. Also by J.Bowden in Jesus: The Unanswered Questions. London. S.C.M. 1988. pp. 153-156.
22. E.Troeltsch. "Uber historich." cited by K.Ward in "Imperialism and Co-existence in Religious Ideology" p.20. also by J.Bowden, Jesus. The Unanswered Questions. pp. 153-154.
23. E.Troeltsch. "Uber historich." p.733f. Quoted by J.Bowden. pp.154-155.
24. E.Troeltsch. "Uber historich." See K.Ward p.20. J.Bowden. p.155.
25. Hick's reply to G.Loughlin in ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick. London. Macmillan. 1991. p.207.
26. G.Loughlin. "Squares and Circles. John Hick and the Doctrine of the Incarnation". in ibid.
p.184.
27. ibid.

28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. *ibid.*
31. *ibid.* p.198.
32. See D.A.Pailin The Anthropological Character of Theology. Cambridge. C.U.P.1990. Ch.6,
for an important argument on these lines.
33. *ibid.* p.117. It is Pailin's belief that Barth's work, in particular his commentary on Romans,
demonstrates the importance of the influence upon him of the collapse of Western civilization
as the result of the First World War, and the ineffectiveness of Liberal Protestantism to combat
this collapse.
34. G.Kaufman. "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness and Christian Theology", in ed.
J.Hick and P.Knitter. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. London. S.C.M. 1988. p.12.
35. G.Kaufman. In Face of Mystery. A Constructive Theology. Cambridge. Massachusetts.
Harvard University Press. 1993. p.63.
36. *ibid.* Throughout this recent synthesis and development of his theological thinking Kaufman
emphasises what he calls "the bio-historical nature of human beings." See especially ch.8.
37. *ibid.* p.133.
38. *ibid.* p.261.
39. P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. vol.1. Nisbet. 1968. Chicago. Chicago University Press.
1963. p.14. Tillich, in defining religion as "...ultimate concern" states that,

*"The religious concern is ultimate; it excludes all other concerns
from ultimate significance; it makes them preliminary...The
unconditional concern is total; no part of ourselves or our world
is excluded from it; there is no "place" to flee from it. The total
concern is infinite: no moment of relaxation and rest is possible
in the face of a religious concern that is ultimate, unconditional,
total and infinite."*
40. J.Hick. Philosophy of Religion. Englewood Cliffs. N.Jersey. Prentice Hall. 1963. p.3.

41. J.Hick. God and The Universe of Faiths. London. Macmillan. 1973. p.133.
42. L.Wittgenstein. Philosophical Investigations. vol.1. trans. (G.E.M.Anscombe). Oxford. Blackwell. 1963. para. 66.
43. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.4. Also, Philosophy of Religion. [3rd edn.] 1983. pp.2-3.
44. *ibid*.
45. R.B.Braithwaite. An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief. Cambridge. C.U.P.1955. Also in ed. B.Mitchell. Philosophy of Religion. Oxford. O.U.P. 1971.
46. D.Cupitt. Taking Leave of God. London. S.C.M. 1980. p.xi.
47. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.190-194.
48. *ibid*. pp.201-204.
49. *ibid*. p.202.
50. The challenge posed by logical positivists centred on an assertion that belief in God seemed to make no appreciable difference between the understanding and expectations of the believer and the non-believer. If belief in God made no difference, it would appear to be wholly vacuous. Many Christian intellectuals accepted the thrust of this attack and denied that Christianity made any factual claims at all. Typical responses were, that Christianity could be defended on grounds of utility, that religious language is simply a declaration of intent to live in a certain way, or that religious language expresses an "idea of God," with no correspondence to the factual reality of God. [D.Z.Phillips, Faith and Philosophical Inquiry. London. Routledge. New York. St.Martins. 1971]. These responses have been strenuously rejected by Hick. See "Religion as Fact-Asserting," in God and the Universe of Faiths. London. Macmillan. 1973. Chapter 2.
51. J.Hick. "Religion as Fact Asserting" in God and the Universe of Faiths. p.27. First published in "Theology Today", Princetown. April,1961, and "Theology", March 1968.
52. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.176.
53. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.35.
54. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.207.

55. *ibid.* pp.207-208.
56. C.Robert Mesle. "Humanism and John Hick's Interpretation of Religion." in ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick. London. Macmillan 1991. pp.58-61.
57. *ibid.* p.82. In Hick's reply to Mesle he refers to D.Griffin's work, "God, Power and Evil." Philadelphia. Westminster Press. 1976. p.309.
58. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. Oxford. Blackwell. 1986. pp.43-45.
59. Hick uses the illustration of two travellers journeying along the same road; one believes it leads to a Celestial City, the other that it leads to nowhere; "their opposed interpretations of the road constituted genuinely rival assertions, though assertions whose assertion-status has the peculiar characteristic of being guaranteed retrospectively by a future crux." From Theology and Verification, first published in "Theology Today," April 1960. Republished in John Hick. The Existence of God. Macmillan 1964, and in John Hick. Faith and Knowledge. Macmillan. 1966. p.150.
60. W.Cantwell Smith. "A Human View of Truth." in ed. J.Hick. Truth and Dialogue in World Religions. Philadelphia. Westminster. 1974. p.20.
61. W.Cantwell Smith. Faith and Belief. Princetown. N.J. Princetown University Press. 1979. p.12.
62. H.H.Price. "Belief In, Belief That" in ed. B.Mitchell. Philosophy of Religion. Oxford. O.U.P. 1971.
63. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.51.
64. J.Hick. Faith and Knowledge. p.xv.
65. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.129.
66. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.51.
67. J.Hick. Faith and Knowledge. p.144.
68. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.129.
69. *ibid.* p.159.
70. J. Hick. Faith and Knowledge. p.132.

71. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.213.
72. R.Swinburne. Faith and Reason. Oxford. O.U.P. 1984. p.85.
73. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. London. Macmillan. pp.59-67.
74. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.99.
75. ibid. p.124.
76. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. Macmillan. London. 1970. pp.107-112.
77. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.211.
78. ibid. p.216.
79. In The Coherence of Theism, Swinburne argues that, ordinarily what one perceives to be there, is there. If it seems to an individual that X is present, then X is present. Our understanding of the world we live in is based on this principle. Things are, usually, what they seem to be and therefore the credulous man is the rational man. Deriving from this principle is the "principle of testimony." Ordinarily, people tell the truth. The reverse would, logically, lead to a situation of utter chaos in which each individual's experience would be unrelated to another's and could not be understood by another. In fact, the situation would be analogous to one in which humans could not trust the veridical character of the external world on the basis of experience. R.Swinburne. The Coherence of Theism. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1977. In God and Skepticism, T.Penelhum argues similarly,
- "...We are aware that we live in a real world, though we cannot prove by any logical formula that it is a real world...the same is true of apprehensions of God. The theistic believer cannot explain how she knows the divine presence to be mediated through her human experience. She just finds herself interpreting her experience in this way."*
- T.Penelhum. God and Skepticism. Lancaster. Dordrecht. D.Reidel. 1983
80. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. pp.114-115.
81. D.Hume. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford. 1902. para. 95. It is also the view of W.James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, that

the existence of many religious types and sects, far from being regrettable, is a reflection of the variety and diversity of human experience, that is to be celebrated.

W.James. The Varieties of Religious Experience. London. Penguin 1985. pp. 486-487.

82. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. p.120.

83. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.376.

84. ibid. p.235.

85. ibid. pp. 222-223.

86. See Klaus Scholder. The Churches and the Third Reich. vol.1. London. S.C.M. & Fortress Press. 1987. Also, J.Bowden. Karl Barth. Theologian. London. S.C.M. 1983, for theories of the influence of pre-war and post-war German politics upon the theology of Karl Barth.

87. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.222.

88. ibid. pp.221-223.

89. S.Coakley. Christ without Absolutes- A Study of the Christology of Ernst Troeltsch. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1988. pp.93-95.

90. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.100.

91. S.Coakley. Christ without Absolutes. p.94.

92. W.Cantwell Smith. The Meaning and End of Religion - A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind. N.York. Harper Row. 1962. London. S.P.C.K. 1978.

93. J.Hick. Philosophy of Religion. Englewood Cliffs. N.J. Prentice Hall. 1983. [3rd Edn.] p.115.

94. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.369.

95. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. p.59.

96. I.Kant. Critique of Pure Reason. London. Macmillan. 1933. p.25.

97. In Faith and Reason R.Swinburne argues that the claim that knowledge of causes must be limited to the sphere of observable phenomena is unjustified; "it would rule out in advance most of the great achievements of science since his [Kant's] day." Swinburne in fact suggests, as a theoretical possibility, that science could discover the cause of the Universe in terms of a Creator God. However, this seems a very remote possibility, overlooking the fact that

scientists seek to discover how the Universe works, not why it works, and are necessarily selective in the data they study. This being so, the discovery of the cause of the Universe in terms of a Creator God could only occur quite by accident, for scientists would not be seeking to discover why the Universe is as it is. R.Swinburne. Faith and Reason. Oxford. O.U.P. 1984.

98. I.Kant. Critique of Pure Reason. p.29.

99. I.Kant. Religion within the limits of Reason Alone. pp.100-101.

100. Plato. The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters. (eds. E.Hamilton and H.Cairns). New York. Bollingen Foundation. 1963.

101. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. p.59.

102. *ibid.* pp.64-67.

103. *ibid.* p.64. More recently, a similar argument has been constructed by Küng; "an unconditional claim, a "categorical" ought, cannot be derived from the finite conditions of human existence, from human urgencies and needs. And even an independent abstract "human nature" or "idea of humanity" [as a legitimating authority] can hardly put an unconditional obligation on anyone for anything. Even a "duty for humankind to survive" can hardly be demonstrated conclusively in a rational way." H.Küng. Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic. London. S.C.M. 1990. p.52.

104. *ibid.* p.67.

105. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.98.

106. *ibid.* pp.98-99.

107. J.Hick. "On Grading Religions", in Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.67-87.

108. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p. 316.

109. Human Society in Ethics and Politics. London. 1954. Bertrand Russell argues that moral values are determined by the needs of society; the community exerts pressure upon the individual to act according to the paramount needs of the group. Society has invented various devices which constrain the individual to harmonize his personal desires with the needs of the community. These devices include government, law and custom, and "morality." Ethics is

"part of an attempt to make man more gregarious than nature made him". Human Society in Ethics and Politics. London. Allen and Unwin. 1954. p.129.

110. P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. Vol.1. London. Nisbet. 1964. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1963. p.14.

111. K.Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith. London. Darton Longman & Todd. 1978. p.44.

112. H.Küng. On Being a Christian. N. York. Doubleday. London. Collins. 1976. p.70.

CHAPTER 2

A Critique of Exclusivist and Inclusivist Theology in Relation to Anthropology and Historical Relativism

Hick's pluralist model for the theology of religions involves an explicit rejection of the Christian responses to other world faiths that have been categorized in terms of the labels, "inclusivist" and "exclusivist." It is my purpose in this chapter to demonstrate that there is in fact an inconsistency in the stance of some inclusivist and exclusivist theologians regarding other world faiths, given their acceptance of certain philosophical insights regarding faith, knowledge and revelation as outlined in Chapter 1. I shall attempt to demonstrate this with reference to the theologies of Lesslie Newbigin and Karl Rahner. These two theologians represent, respectively, the exclusivist and inclusivist approaches to faiths outside Christianity. While their views would not necessarily be identical with those of other theologians whose works have been categorized within this tripartite framework, exclusivism / inclusivism / pluralism, nevertheless we may assume a certain similarity of response to the fundamental theological issue in question between these representative theologians and other exclusivists and inclusivists.

Whilst accepting that the tripartite classification of theological thinking, "exclusivist" "inclusivist" and "pluralist" does not do justice to the range of theological thinking that is discernible, nevertheless I find it preferable to the alternative model proposed by J. Peter Schineller, Christ and the Church; a Spectrum of Views, for several reasons. Schineller's fourfold grouping is as follows:

1. Ecclesiocentric universe, exclusive christology.
2. Christocentric universe, inclusive christology.
3. Theocentric universe, normative christology.
4. Theocentric universe, non-normative christology. *1.*

Whilst the fourfold grouping is not without merits, it is my belief that it complicates the issue of classifying theological thinking without necessarily clarifying it. For example, Hick's pluralism

can scarcely, in its most recent developments, be considered "theocentric." 2. Nor does this typology allow us to do justice to the range of theological thinking to an appreciably greater extent than the tripartite system. For example, in Jesus Christ at the Encounter of Worlds Religions J. Dupuais classifies the christology of Ernst Troeltsch in category 3, "theocentric universe, normative christology." 3. However, this is not beyond dispute. Troeltsch's christology, at least in his later writings, would not necessarily be considered "normative," if we take "normative" to mean "an ideal type which can be used as a measure for others," which is the sense in which it will be used in this thesis, according to my understanding of the meaning. In his later writings Troeltsch speaks of the relationship between Christianity and other world faiths in terms in which Christ is not normative, in this sense. 4. Therefore it is my intention to adhere to the tripartite system, recognising its limitations in classifying the entire range of theological thinking which is certainly a presupposition of an anthropological approach to theology.

1. Exclusivist Theology in relation to Anthropology and Historical Relativism: Lesslie Newbigin

As we saw towards the end of Chapter 1, many Christian theologians give limited assent to the idea of there being a general revelation in the sense of an innate human awareness of God. Lesslie Newbigin writes, in The Gospel in a Pluralist Society,

"...God is the same always and everywhere and to everyone. This is why it seems to be the case that wherever human beings are found there are always evidences of some kind of awareness of God, however faint and confused." 5.

However, he qualifies this,

"...no overview of the total human situation can provide authentic knowledge of the purpose of the Creator...we have to add that this general revelation, valid as it is, cannot communicate the purpose of God for his creation...We have no alternative but to begin with

one specific community and the tradition of rationality developed within that community." 6

Newbigin examines in detail the relationship between reason and experience. He argues that they are inseparable; reason is the faculty we use to sift experience and order it within a framework, to make sense of the world we live in. He emphasizes the fact that traditions of rationality are necessarily embodied in specific historical/cultural contexts;

"...every exercise of reason depends on a social and linguistic tradition which is, therefore, something which has the contingent, accidental character of all historical happenings...There are no "truths of reason" except those that have been developed in a historical tradition." 7.

"Truth" and "reason" are thus located in society and in history; there can be no such thing as innate, unconditioned reason, for the social and historical context determines the framework of what is rational.

Historical Relativism

Newbigin's work is an examination of the relationship between history and relativity; he emphasizes the influence of what he calls the "plausibility structure" of society, which he believes functions today to create a pluralist world-view. The idea of a plausibility structure signifies the patterns of belief and practice which are held as norms by any given society and which determine which beliefs and practices may be held as reasonable by its members. According to Newbigin's analysis [which he utilizes in Christian apologetic] it is the case that in a modern, pluralist and predominantly secular society, it is considered unreasonable for the religious truths of any one tradition to be held as absolute and authoritative. What is true for me may not be true for you. All religious truth is relative truth. Religious truths are thus marginalized, for they are not matters of fact, but matters of belief, which may be accepted or rejected. However, society does not make this statement about all truth; the "truths" of the physical sciences, for example, do not have the

status of relative truth. It would be held as absurd, for example, to claim that it was a matter of opinion that the sun is the centre of our solar system and that the earth and the planets revolve around it. This, within the prevailing plausibility structure is a matter of fact about which there can be no dispute, but the truths of religion do not have this status.

Newbigin believes that the problem for the Christian is that he or she inhabits a plausibility structure which is, as it were, at odds with the plausibility structure of the mainstream secular and pluralist society. For Newbigin, the Bible itself creates for the Christian believer the framework or plausibility structure which must determine his or her view of the prevailing norms and values of external society. *"...Our proper relation to the Bible is not that we examine it from the outside, but that we indwell it and from within it seek to understand what is out there."* 8.

For Newbigin, it is axiomatic that knowledge of God becomes possible for the human individual through, and only through, Christian Scripture. *"...The possibility is actualized in the fact that God does reveal himself and has revealed himself."* 9.

In Barthian terms, to which Newbigin would subscribe, the Bible is not seen as Revelation itself, but, uniquely and exclusively, has the capacity to become the means by which God is revealed to the human individual more fully and completely than he can be revealed by any other religious tradition or scripture.

"...The Christian tradition affirms that God has made his mind and purpose known to some [not to all] people through events in history - not all events but some, the memory of which is treasured in the Christian tradition." 10.

Newbigin is surely right to question the dichotomy that is created in modern society between verifiable facts such as those of science, and the beliefs of religious traditions which are relativized and marginalized. This is a false dichotomy; such a world-view oversimplifies the way scientists proceed in their enquiry. Not all scientific facts are of equal status: the scientist must necessarily sift facts and select those he or she believes to be most significant in order to proceed in any investigation; the subjectivity of the perceiving scientist is also a significant factor in the enquiry

itself. The prevailing world-view, which attaches high status to scientific facts also gives too little weight to intuitive belief, the leap of imagination which may be a necessary pre-condition for the formation of hypotheses in the first place. It also glosses over the fact that scientific truth, also, is located in history. For example, the present day fact of Copernican astronomy was, for long periods of history, held as a matter of opinion, and would have been considered absurd, not a fact at all, in still earlier historical time when the Ptolemaic theory was held as an incontrovertible fact. Scientific facts, in common with other so-called facts, are only relatively true.

However, Newbigin's argument regarding the influence and importance of society's plausibility structure is less convincing in that it is very one-sided. He uses it in Christian apologetic, to underline the difficulties of the present-day Christian believer, whose plausibility structure must be created by Scripture itself and thus is at odds with the mainstream. Given that the plausibility structure of any society is variable according to social and historical conditions, and that it exerts a powerful influence, it must necessarily be the case that the plausibility structure of First Century Palestinians was equally influential in shaping the beliefs and truths of their society, for, by Newbigin's own axioms,

"...there are no "truths of reason" except those that have been developed in a historical tradition...every exercise of reason depends on a social and linguistic tradition which is, therefore, something which has the contingent, accidental character of all historical happenings." 11.

Traditions of rationality, Newbigin has told us, shape and determine the truths of historical experience. We cannot know exactly what tradition of rationality prevailed in First Century Palestine, for we are not First Century Palestinians, but it seems reasonable to suppose that it was rather different from our own. It is a possible hypothesis that the plausibility structure of the Biblical witnesses may have predisposed them towards a supernaturalist, incarnational interpretation of the historical events which are the content of Christian Revelation. It will be necessary to explore this idea further, in Chapter 4, when we examine the traditional

Christological formulations of the Church. For the present, the suggestion is simply that Newbigin seems to deplore the enormous influence of the prevailing plausibility structure in the modern context and virtually ignores its influence in the Biblical context. But, conceptually, the idea of a plausibility structure is a double-edged sword; it cannot be used as a weapon of attack in one context and ignored in another, if a convincing argument is to be sustained. Newbigin does not claim that human perception of historical events is absolute and non-interpretative He writes;

"...in all cases we are interpreting the events. In no way do we have access to "what really happened" apart from any tradition of rational discourse and there is no external criterion by which we can decide in advance which tradition is the one to be relied on." 12.

By his own axioms, all events are interpreted through the spectacles of some plausibility structure. Yet, in a sense, he seems to ignore his own axioms; he tells us of the constraints of the historian's task, but does not acknowledge the logical implications of these constraints. He states,

"...all writing of history involves selection among the vast mass of possible material...these data are themselves the products of some decision about what was significant enough to be remembered or recorded," 13.

However, he does not follow up the logical implications of these constraints as regards Biblical history, for he clings to the absolute status of the Revelation of Christian Scripture, and its superiority over any other alleged revelation of God. He shows a strong but very one-sided awareness of historical relativity. These instances of concessions to historical relativity make it the more remarkable that Newbigin recommends so strongly that we attempt to inhabit the tradition of rationality of the Early Christian Church, and from this standpoint, criticize the pluralist norms of society. Even supposing that it is possible to stand outside the structure of rationality that underpins our own understanding of what rational discourse is, the fact is that we are being asked to inhabit a plausibility structure about which we must, apparently, be a-critical. Not only do we know very little about it, we are not invited to discover more; critical as Newbigin is about the

prevailing norms of our plausibility structure, he does not follow up his statements of awareness of historical relativity by any suggestion that it is equally necessary to approach critically the plausibility structure which prevailed in Biblical times. In effect, he fails to follow the momentum of his own thought. He touches on the nature of the historian's task but does not follow up the logical implications of his own historical consciousness.

Nor is his position in relation to the distinction between general revelation and Christian Revelation entirely satisfactory. General revelation is valid in that it comes from God himself. ¹⁴. It is not merely some kind of natural revelation of the Divine. Yet it is, apparently, not salvific revelation. If the general Revelation, given to non-Christian faiths, is from God himself, it must surely be authentic revelation. The idea that it is authentic without being salvific leads to the supposition of a very capricious, unjust God, who has chosen certain minority groups of persons for salvation. This, however, is not Newbigin's meaning; he explains this apparent selectivity on the part of God by means of the doctrine of election. It is Newbigin's belief that the doctrine of election is essential to a true understanding of the Biblical narrative, and provides a scheme for synthesizing universality and particularity within Christianity. Whether we like it or not, God's universal salvific purpose is carried out through a set of specific choices, the choice of Israel, the choice of the disciples of Jesus, chosen to be "fishers of men," [Mark 1.17.] the choice of the Church, "to declare the wonderful deeds of God," [1. Pet.2.9.] ¹⁵. Statements of universality [Romans 10.12-13.] are qualified by statements affirming the requirement of mission. [Romans 10.14-15.] There will be those who are chosen to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, that all may receive it. Thus, universality and particularity are not to be seen as incompatible or contradictory, but, on the contrary, are complementary principles by which God's purpose for men and women is achieved.

According to Newbigin, contemporary criticism of the doctrine of election on the grounds that it is unacceptably elitist cannot be allowed to overrule the facts of the Biblical assertion, that it is by means of particular persons that God has chosen to make known his universal salvific will. The

sovereign will of God cannot be gainsaid by criticism that is the product of particular cultural norms, peculiar to the historical times in which we live. Newbigin is fully conscious of the "scandal of particularity," and the negative effects of its impact on the world faiths at certain times in Christian history, to the present day. 16. He stresses also that election is not to be understood as in any way a privileged status, it is not a contract between God and man by which salvation is assured, rather, the reverse is true, it is a fearsome responsibility and warnings of judgement are addressed primarily to the elect. [Matthew 7, 21-23. Luke 13, 23-30.] Men and women must be aware that salvation always takes place through a free act of grace on God's part, and his is the sole prerogative in judgement. 17.

At this point one may ask, how far does Newbigin's defence of the doctrine of election and his synthesis of the universalist and particularist aspects of Christianity help to render the "scandal of particularity" less scandalous? How far has he provided an acceptable answer to the questions that might very reasonably be asked by any devout Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim, "why is it that a God of universal love cannot make himself known to me and cannot provide for my salvation within the tradition of my birth? Why is it necessary to import a European tradition [and, incidentally, European elitism and imperialism] when I have, already provided for me, a tradition of profound religious insight and experience?" Newbigin's defence of the doctrine of election is, not surprisingly, rooted in Biblical texts which, for him, constitute the absolute Revelation of God.

"...Within the Christian tradition the Bible is received as the testimony of those events in which God has disclosed ["revealed"] the shape of the story [of human history] as a whole, because in Jesus the beginning and the end of the story, the Alpha and Omega are revealed, made known, disclosed." 18.

He does however concede that the Biblical narrative should not be seen as set apart or immune from historical criticism, "salvation history," for Newbigin, is not to be understood apart from human history as a whole. Therefore the questions posed by scientific historiography, "what are the sources of the stories about Jesus? what evidence can we gather about the reliability of the

witnesses? what was their purpose in writing?" - are perfectly legitimate questions. 19. Nonetheless, Newbigin warns that the historian will inevitably bring to the enquiry certain beliefs, presuppositions and prejudices which must affect the outcome of the enquiry. As a human thinker, it is inevitably the case that he or she is unable to pursue any kind of enquiry unconditioned by the cultural norms - what Newbigin has elsewhere called the plausibility structure - which make him or her the person that he or she is. And herein lies the real problem, for the historian of course will not necessarily bring to the enquiry the presuppositions of the Christian believer, which must be that, in Jesus, the truth is revealed absolutely. 20.

Again we seem to be confronted by the "impasse" caused by Newbigin's very one-sided application of the idea of a plausibility structure, for much as it is certainly the case that the modern day historian is a culturally conditioned human thinker, the same must also have been true of the Biblical witnesses. Newbigin seems to want to claim a unique status for the Biblical writers which cannot be accepted by his own axioms concerning human conditioning. Unless he is claiming that in some way the texts of the Bible were presented to humankind as the direct word of God, unconditioned by human thinking, sifting and interpreting, he must also accept that the Biblical witnesses and writers must have approached their task with certain presuppositions. We cannot know precisely what these presuppositions were, but they must have existed. Historical exegesis suggests that the Biblical narrative was not in any sense received as a direct, unmediated miracle of intervention on the part of God, but was the product of human thinkers. Revealed knowledge of the divine, as I suggested in the previous chapter, is conditioned by the ways of understanding of those who grasp it. Moreover, it is culturally specific; Newbigin seems to fail to accept that the insights of a particular revelation, such as that given to Israel, 2000 years ago, may be misapplied if they are held to contain truths which must be applied universally, in very different times and places. 21.

Newbigin's inconsistency with respect to the anthropological conditioning of all human thinking may be further illustrated by means of reversing an axiom he holds himself; it is Newbigin's belief

that it is impossible to begin to understand anything except by relating it to what is already known and taken for granted. 22. This must certainly be the case; any new hypothesis with which we are confronted is received in the light of hypotheses already believed to be true. The Christian believer, Newbigin asserts, by "indwelling" the Bible,

"...brings to the interpretation ... the presupposition that the point of the whole human story has been revealed here; that in Jesus the whole meaning of the story is disclosed; that everything else, including all the axioms and presuppositions and models developed in all the cultures of mankind are relativized by and must be judged in the light of this presupposition." 23.

But suppose instead, that one starts from an entirely different presupposition, that one's very conception of God entails that he is not God unless he has made himself known equally and authentically [though in a variety of ways] to all people in all times and at all places. Newbigin might argue that this is not a presupposition that derives from any sacred text or inerrant scripture [though it could derive from an overview of the totality of such texts] but is a purely human hypothesis. Nevertheless, it does not seem to me that any qualification such as this precludes it from being held as a perfectly reasonable presupposition by a theistic enquirer. Indeed, it could be held as a "categorical imperative", in Kantian terms. That is to say, it could be held to be absolutely indispensable to the essence of God as one conceives him to exist as the grounding of human moral knowledge, that he cannot be God unless he has indeed made himself equally and authentically available to all human beings as they exist in their historical and cultural conditions. 24.

Clearly, it is very far from being easy to eradicate [or even slightly shift] certain presuppositions held by the culturally and historically conditioned individual. Newbigin concedes this when he writes;

"...The framework which I devise or discern is my ultimate commitment or else it cannot function in the way intended. As such a commitment it must defend its claim to truth over against

other claims to truth. I have no standpoint except the point where I stand. The claim that I have is simply the claim that mine is the standpoint from which it is possible to discern the truth that relativizes all truth." 25.

These are forceful words, yet, while acknowledging that similar claims must inevitably be made by believers of other faiths, he seems to object to similar "absolutism" on Hick's part, criticizing not only his theology but his terminology when he proposes, "...a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre, to a realization that it is God who is at the centre, and all the religions of mankind, including one's own, serve and revolve around him." 26.

This, according to Newbigin, is an assertion that Hick's own presuppositions are the way to arrive at the truth, while those of Christianity are not;

"...what claims to be a model for the unity of religions turns out in fact to be the claim that one theologian's conception of God is the reality which is the central essence of all religions...Hick's conception of God is simply the truth, and there is no possibility that one of the world's religions can challenge it." 27.

But how, one may ask, if Newbigin is right, does Hick's position in this respect differ from his own? How, by Newbigin's own axioms, is it possible for Hick to think and write except from the basis that religious pluralism is the truth, if this is something that he holds in faith as an absolute commitment, an indispensable presupposition, before all other thinking? Newbigin asserts that a humanly conceived "idealist" notion of a Transcendent Being is a less reliable starting point for the religious quest, than a historic person, such as Jesus. 28. This is his standpoint. But surely he must concede Hick's right also, to have no standpoint except the point where he stands?

The basic presupposition of this study is that, since theologians are human, theological thinking is itself shaped and conditioned by the historical and cultural context in which the theologian finds himself or herself. In other words, to use Newbigin's own terminology, the prevailing plausibility structure of society will inevitably influence the theologian's apprehension of what he or she

believes to be religious truth. 29. Moreover, the plausibility structure of society is not one entity, but many, for history is in a constant state of flux, and what is so today in a given historical context may be different in the same context tomorrow. Viewed in this way, the human demand for absolutes, for reliable and certain truth is understandable, but is refuted by the historical process itself. Historical relativism is in effect a recognition of the tension that exists between our awareness of ourselves as historical beings, who exist and experience ourselves only within historical time, and our requirement for absolute religious truth. The religions of the world can be viewed as the vehicles through which the individual's innate orientation towards God finds concrete expression. Yet the existence of the world's religions in history predetermines that they are, through their historical nature, limited and changing, in contrast with the Absolute, which is limitless and unchanging. Though the religions of the world seek the Absoluteness of God, they are all, through the determination of their very natures, incomplete and partial manifestations of religious truth. As Kaufman has written "*...human existence is in a fundamental and quite specific way historical.*" 30. By this he means that humans, uniquely among living creatures, have constructed for themselves systems of language, patterns of meaning, symbolic orders and cultural systems which are characterised by a complexity far beyond what is necessary for simple biological survival. It is his belief that complex human systems are part of a creative cosmic process or historical trajectory, which he calls "serendipitous creativity"; within this conceptual framework he locates the linguistic symbol, "God", in such a way that it becomes more meaningful for men and women as they find themselves in the present historical context.³¹ In the particular historical context of the present day, we must redirect our ideas and energies towards solving the many religious and moral problems with which we are confronted. This aspect of Kaufman's thesis is one we shall return to, in the context of an examination of shared ethical concerns among world faiths.

For the present, it is simply worth noting that Kaufman's analysis of the complexity of human systems, emerging in history, also implies that such systems are also immensely diverse. He believes there can be a theocentric frame of orientation for life as an ultimate point of reference in our biological existence; we have constructed and will continue to construct images and concepts

of God which all necessarily fall short of the reality of God as Ultimate Mystery. It is necessary, however for us to come to terms with the implications of the fact of diversity in human cultures generally and in theological systems in particular. Diversity implies partial and incomplete knowledge and the great likelihood that an alternative theology is no less complete, or adequate, than our own.

"...if we understand that all theologies are products of human imaginative construction we cannot but welcome the attempts of others, from quite different perspectives, to address in their own distinctive ways the deep moral and religious problems of our society; the adversarial stance towards other points of view, so often expressed in theological writing in the past, no longer has any point". 32.

2. Inclusivist Theology in relation to Anthropology and Historical Relativism: Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner, our representative inclusivist theologian, also gives very positive assent to the idea of there being a general revelation, accessible to all humankind, indeed, Rahner believes human consciousness is so constructed that it is innately orientated towards the mystery of God. Grace is an intrinsic element in human nature, and through grace, God's salvific action is intended for all men and women. Central to his theology is the notion of "Vorgriff," the Infinite, which is the object of an "a priori" transcendental element in the nature of human beings, which he has called the "supernatural existential." 33. This element precedes all that is acquired by humans through experience, and can be defined in terms of the sort of questions asked by people about themselves and their existence in relation to what they conceive as reality. Such questions as "what is truth?" "does God exist?" and "what is meant by freedom, love or justice?" - are orientated towards a reality that transcends the empirically historical world, though they are necessarily mediated through temporal/spatial existence. They are the hallmarks of the transcendental nature of humans, who are specifically orientated towards the completeness of the mystery of God.

"...For we can say what man is only if we say what he has to do with and what concerns him. But in the case of man who is a transcendental subject, this is boundless, something which is nameless and ultimately it is the mystery whom we call God." 34.

However, man is also a thoroughly historical being, who experiences his orientation towards God only in and through the events of history. Rahner recognizes that man's knowledge is always connected with the world he lives in and is mediated through his sensory perception of this environment. All explicit knowledge and experience men gain in the world is therefore "a posteriori"; Rahner calls this "categorical knowledge." It is essential, he believes, for the theological enquiry to direct itself towards man's experience of himself in the world.

"...Because it is the union of the real essence of God and of man in God's personal self-expression in his eternal Logos, for this reason Christology is the beginning and the end of anthropology, and this anthropology in its most radical actualization is for all eternity theology." 35.

This, then, is the essential link between the "anthropological" and "transcendental" aspects of Rahner's theology. This link, as I hope to demonstrate, gives rise to some tension, not only in terms of his stance in relation to non-Christian religions, but in terms of the internal coherence of his theology itself.

Rahner's Christology, [which will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4, when I discuss philosophical objections Hick has raised against the traditional Christian doctrine of Incarnation] is, essentially, kenotic Christology. In his self-emptying love, God facilitates the essential fulfilment of man's God-orientated nature, by becoming manifest in human history as the man, Jesus Christ. The Incarnation of God in the man Jesus is the realization of the highest possibility of man's being, the unique, supreme case of the total actualization of human reality. 36. It is essential, because Rahner believes man experiences his transcendental orientation towards God only in and through the events of history, that this should be an actual historical event.

"...If this total event of the bestowal of grace on all mankind finds its fulfilment, it must have a concrete tangibility in history. It cannot be sudden and acosmic and purely meta-historical, but rather this fulfilment must take place in such a way that this event emanates in time and space from one point." 37.

Rahner emphasises not only the historicity of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but their uniqueness. He believes God's self-communication through Christ has a universal significance, it is intended for all men and women, but nevertheless, he believes that it is a unique event that has happened and can only happen once. He does not claim that Christ is the exclusive revelation of God, but in the sense of God offering himself in self-communication there can be only one event in which God speaks the "ultimate word." To believe otherwise would be to undermine the historicity of the event and to dilute the significance of what did take place in Jesus Christ.

"...The truth of a divine humanity would be mythologized if it were simply a datum of every person always and everywhere. Such an idea would also overlook the fact that the humanity of God, in which the God-man as individual exists for every individual person, neither is nor can be graced in itself with a closeness to God and an encounter with God which is essentially different from the encounter and self-communication of God which is in fact intended for every person in grace, and which has its highest actualization in man in the beatific vision." 38.

In a sense, however, while emphasising the historicity of Christ, Rahner seeks to transcend historical barriers, through the eschatological dimension of his christology, and through his revised theory of atonement. Rahner is dissatisfied with the classical satisfaction theory of atonement by which it is maintained that the alienation of humanity from God, through sin, is healed only by the Incarnation and Resurrection. Within this theory, classically expressed by Anselm, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus bring about the salvation of humanity, which was previously not

possible. Rahner's objections to this are rooted in the unacceptability of the idea of a transformation of God, that, in fact, a capricious God has changed his will in relation to the ultimate destiny of humanity, rather than that the nature of God is changeless and boundless love.

39. Further, in relation to the hypostatic union, this theory implies that *"...the one making satisfaction and the one accepting it are...the same."* 40.

Rahner finds this idea implausible. Lastly, the satisfaction theory of atonement limits the idea of the saving grace of Christ to the community of believing Christians; this is at variance with Rahner's axiom that the grace of Christ is always and everywhere available, even to those who do not know or confess him.

Rahner seeks to avoid the difficulties inherent in the satisfaction theory of atonement by maintaining that Jesus is not the efficient but the final cause of God's salvific will.

"...the Incarnation and the cross are, in scholastic terminology, the "final cause" of the universal self-communication of God to the world which we call the Holy Spirit, a self-communication given with God's salvific will which has no cause outside God."

41.

By "final" Rahner means the outward expression of what has always been present [ie. the salvific will of God] but was previously obscured. The absolute self-communication of God becomes manifest in the Incarnation and Resurrection. Most importantly, "cause" is not to be understood in the mechanistic sense of "that which brings something about", it is, rather, a "cause" in the sense of being an absolute, irrefutably true sign of that salvation.

"...If salvation history is irreversibly directed in this sense to salvation, and not to damnation, through a concrete event, then this historically tangible occurrence must be a sign of the salvation of the whole world in the sense of a "real symbol" and so possesses a type of causality where salvation is concerned."

42.

In this way, Rahner's christology assumes an eschatological dimension, which, he believes, allows it to transcend the constraints of historical methodology. What happened in Jesus is not simply a historical event; as the "final cause" of salvation, he is of universal significance both in the present, [sacramentally] and in the future [eschatologically.] Rahner sees the entire Christian experience as a continuum. "...*What we know about Christian eschatology is what we know about man's present situation in the history of salvation...in man's experience of himself and of God in grace and in Christ we project our Christian present in to its future.*" 43.

Several questions arise, in relation to this thesis. Firstly, how far is Rahner using the notion of "salvation history" to by-pass problems associated with the historical/critical method? In doing so, is not his theology in tension with his own admissions of the lack of certainty of the life of Jesus and his own assent to the anthropological nature of theology? Secondly, how far is this tension aggravated by his insistence on the uniqueness of Christ - in view of his equal insistence on the universality of God's grace? Thirdly and lastly, in the light of New Testament evidence, which suggests a considerable gulf between Jesus' eschatology and the Church's extrapolations in dogmatic theology, and in the light of what Rahner himself says of the "hiddenness" of the last things, is not Rahner's eschatological christology too deeply entrenched in traditional ecclesiology to be entirely plausible? We shall examine these possible objections in turn.

1. "Salvation History" as an a-Historical Concept?

Rahner draws a distinction between "Geschichte", "salvation history", and "historisch," the merely historical, which can be grasped outside faith. "Geschichte", conversely, can only be understood from within an existentially committed free assent to faith in which "...*the grace of faith opens one's eyes to the credibility of particular historical events.*" 44. In asserting the primacy of faith, he attempts to overcome the tension between the relative certainty of historical facts about the life and work of Jesus [which, as we shall see, he freely admits] and the absolute requirements of faith.

But how far is such a distinction actually legitimate? If we accept the application of historical criticism, we concede that all historical events are unique in the sense that they occur once and once only, yet all are bound together in permanent correlation, in that historical events of far reaching importance must inevitably affect the future course of history. Any religion which claims to be founded in history can legitimately claim links between its historical roots, its present-day relevance and its futuristic dimensions, indeed, without such a correlation between the event of the past and subsequent developments, such a religion could scarcely survive as a living faith. But parallels can be drawn between religiously significant historical events [for example, the life and death of Jesus] and secularly significant historical events [for example, the Second World War.] In the case of the first, we see, for example, the correlation of the growth of the Church, of dogmatic theology, of eschatological predictions. In the latter case we see the correlation of the breakdown of colonialism, of the emergence of two dominant world powers, the Cold War, and so on, into an infinity that also encompasses the hope of future world harmony. My point in drawing these parallels between "secular" and "religious" historical events is to question whether it is necessarily true that the eschatological dimension of Rahner's christology allows him to transcend the constraints of history, for the distinction between "Geschichte" and "historisch" may be a false one. The crucial aspect of this distinction, according to Rahner is that it is only to be apprehended in faith. But it is surely necessary to ask, what is the nature of the faith Rahner refers to? From whence does it derive and how does it manifest itself?

Faith, for Rahner, is the linchpin of the God-man relationship. There is an indissoluble link, between God and man, which determines the giving and receiving of a faith which Rahner sees as both a gratuitous miracle and a decision made in freedom. The giver/receiver relationship is defined in terms of the idea of man reaching out to God through the transcendental nature that is the essence of his humanity.

"...The knowledge of God is...a transcendental knowledge because man's basic and original orientation towards absolute mystery, which constitutes his fundamental experience of God, is a permanent existential of man as spiritual subject." 45.

Here, Rahner assents to a universalist conception of faith, defined as innate awareness of God, realised experientially. Yet he also believes that this faith, though valid, is incomplete if it does not also assent to the truths of Christianity as the Church professes them to be. But the fact is that the universalist and general conception of faith is supported by history, in that religious belief is a nearly universal phenomenon, and acknowledged by Rahner to be essential to the true nature of human consciousness, whereas the truths of Christianity required in faith by the believing Christian are supported, on Rahner's own admission, only by relative historical certainty, and are confined to a minority of persons in historical time and place. If we were to make a value judgement about conceptions of faith, the historical perspective, at least, would seem to point to the greater authenticity of faith as innate awareness of God, realised in a diversity of experience, as opposed to the particularity of the Christian experience.

The tension between the universalist and particularist conceptions of faith within Rahner's theology is highlighted by his own acknowledgement of the uncertainty of the historical data about the life of Jesus. He states that,

"...Christological assertions have a historical dimension...they are also inevitably burdened with all the difficulties and uncertainties of knowing an event which lies far back in history." 46.

Unlike some modern critics of the historical/critical method, he does not retreat from the problem by asserting that, ultimately, historical issues are of negligible importance. According to Rahner,

"...the historical events with which we are dealing here are not of such a nature that despite all our historical curiosity about their existence, their more exact nature and their interpretation, we can ultimately forget about them. These events are rather of decisive importance for man's existence." 47.

History is important, and historical certitude is simply not to be obtained, yet, paradoxically, faith requires an absolute commitment which should be "accepted calmly" for,

"...a person cannot live out his existence without calmly accepting the inevitability of such an incongruence between the relative

certainty of his historical knowledge on the one hand, and the absoluteness of his commitment on the other." 48.

Here, Rahner attempts to minimize the difficulties inherent in the tension that arises between the absolute requirement of faith in one saviour, Jesus Christ, and the acknowledgement of historical uncertainty about his life and work. Given that the Christian believer must accept the incongruence between the absolute requirement of faith, and the relative certainty of our historical knowledge of Jesus, he or she may affirm, with Rahner, that,

"...faith in its formal and existential structure is the real and only legitimate criterion for deciding what historical and factual content is really to be counted as part of its essence and what is not. All content of an historical nature which cannot be reached by this approach to the essence of faith is not essential to faith and cannot be the object of a genuine article of faith." 49.

Faith, then, is to be selective in terms of the historical data, and is in itself to determine the acceptance of propositional truth. As I have stated, Rahner seems to assert the primacy of faith, as distinct from historical knowledge, in his attempt to overcome the tension between the relative certainty of historical facts about the life and work of Jesus, and the absolute requirements of faith. This results, ultimately, in a retreat from, or a narrowing down, of the notion of faith as "Vorgriff." Rahner writes;

"...man is a transcendent being insofar as all of his conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension [Vorgriff] of "being" as such, in an unthematic but ever-present knowledge of the infinity of reality...he also experiences hope, the movement towards liberating freedom, and the responsibility which imposes upon him real burdens and also blesses them." 50.

Here, I believe he touches at the very essence of a universalist conception of human religiosity. This, however, is undermined by the qualifications he later feels obliged to impose upon faith in order to strait-jacket it into acceptable Christian confines, and in order that faith may be the

determinant of our apprehension of "salvation history." My suggestion is that, in this way, Rahner only succeeds in making a distinction between "Geschichte" and "historich" by means of a retreat from his own powerful and persuasive analysis of the nature of faith as a pre-apprehension of God, essential to the very nature of humanity.

Rahner has acknowledged that there is in the modern world a profound crisis in faith [in the narrower sense of the acceptance of specifically Christian propositions.] If faith, the human response to Revelation, is in crisis, it must logically be supposed that Revelation itself is not so absolutely obvious and compelling that its content can be imposed as a mystery that requires no further discussion. If this were so, the present crisis in faith would be wholly unaccountable. Rahner in fact traces the problems facing Christians today, in part, to the imposition of what he calls a "formal structure"; statements of dogma are expressed in such a way that they seem to be unrelated to man's interpretation of his own experience and alien to his way of thinking. Theological concepts have undergone a process of ossification; there is a need for them to be reinterpreted in the light of present-day experience. There must be,

"...a new language of faith, and this new language cannot under any circumstances be the ghetto language of the initiated." 51. Rahner himself affirms the Christological formulations of the Council of Chalcedon, unlike some theologians whose work has also been labelled according to the inclusivist paradigm. 52. Yet he believes a variety of Christological models are acceptable within Christianity, implicitly acknowledging the philosophical difficulties which the orthodox "substance Christology" may present to the theologian and believer. There seems to be some tension here, between his reluctance to sever his Christology from the Chalcedonian formulation and his recognition that this formulation is in part responsible for man's alienation from Christianity; this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

We have seen that Rahner has emphasised the meeting point between theology and anthropology: he also acknowledges the anthropological conditioning of his own theological thinking. By his own

axioms, it is only possible for him to formulate a theology through his own experience. He concedes this in answer to the question, why should it be Jesus?

"...A man can simply begin with what he is and what he already believes. The limited nature of his existence makes it fundamentally impossible for him to work his way through every possible religion and philosophy. Why should he not begin, then, with the one who was the only one in history to assert that he was more than simply a prophet and to claim that he was himself the self-communication of God to man?" 53.

This is, clearly, an honest answer which concedes the human conditioning of Rahner's own thinking. Two objections may be raised. Firstly, that New Testament exegesis has cast considerable doubt upon the question of whether Jesus did in fact make any such assertion. 54. This is an issue I shall address explicitly in Chapter 4. Secondly, as Rahner knows very well, the vast majority of humankind, both now and in the past, start from a very different position from his own in the quest for spiritual truth, and this must inevitably affect their apprehension of Christian theology.

2. The Uniqueness of Christ?

The tensions in Rahner's theology between the universalist and particularist conceptions of faith are considerably aggravated, I believe, by his insistence on the uniqueness of Christ. In many ways, his account of Incarnation makes the concept itself more meaningful; it is seen as the fulfilment of our innate orientation towards divine mystery, the actualization of our reaching out to the infinite, to which we are drawn by our spiritual natures. But in describing the depth of meaning of what took place in Jesus, Rahner inadvertently paves the way for the possibility that incarnation, as process, could take place elsewhere. If God's will to self-communication and our divinely orientated human natures are what Rahner says they are, there seems no logical reason why this could not be so, that we could claim not only "in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was

pleased to dwell" [Col. 1:19] but also "you [other saviour figures] may be filled with the fullness of God." [Eph.3:19.]. Bruce Marshall has explored the tensions which exist between the universality of Rahner's Christology, and the particularity of Jesus. According to Marshall, in Christology in Conflict, developments in philosophy since the mid Seventeenth century have entailed that the concept of "absolute saviour" became severed from the person of Jesus. The absolute saviour, or redeemer becomes a moral archetype, an ideal of moral perfection which is universally accessible through human reason, and not necessarily and indissolubly linked to the person of Jesus. 55. Rahner's Christology, he believes, attempts to draw on this general principle of universal accessibility while unsuccessfully retaining the particularity of Jesus. Whilst not in agreement with Marshall regarding the ontological status of Jesus I share, to a very great extent, his concerns regarding the inconsistency of Rahner's Christology. As we have seen within Rahner's entire theological enterprise, the concept of "absolute saviour" is, in itself, intrinsically enmeshed in the transcended nature of human beings, who are universally orientated towards the mystery of God. According to Marshall,

"...Rahner's account of the meaningfulness, credibility and existential assimilability of "an absolute saviour" fails to include any reference to Jesus Christ as a particular person" 56.

Thus, "that Jesus Christ is the absolute saviour" cannot be deduced from the concept of saviour itself; salvation through Christ comes in an actual historical encounter. But, logically according to the premises of Rahner's Christology, an unspecifiably diverse variety of persons could function as the focus of faith, if it is God's saving grace alone, and God's self offering, which facilitates human awareness of the concept of "absolute saviour". This, as Marshall points out, leads to an inconsistency in Rahner's Christology. either he must hold that Jesus, as a historical person, is the only means of salvation, or he must sever the concept of salvation from the status of universality. He cannot, with consistency, hold both views.

Rahner holds the view that God's offer of himself in absolute self-communication is, essentially, a historical event.

"...The truth of divine humanity would be mythologized if it were simply a datum of every person always and everywhere. Such an idea would also overlook the fact that the humanity of God, in which the God-man exists for every individual person, neither is, nor can be graced in itself with a closeness to God and an encounter with God which is essentially different from the encounter and self-communication of God which in fact is intended for every person in grace, and which has its highest actualization in man in the beatific vision." 57.

For Rahner, there is, and can only be, one unique manifestation of God, in the fullness of his revelation, in the man Jesus, in a particular historical time and place. Thus there seems to be a sense in which Rahner seems to believe that the actuality and tangibility of what took place in Jesus would be undermined if it were held to be repeatable, at least in theory, in other saviour figures. I find it very difficult to see why this should be so. If the encounter and self-communication of God can only take place in one specific and unique historical event, then God, who is deemed to desire the salvation of all humankind, must necessarily be less accessible to humans as they find themselves in the diversity of human history, than if he had manifested himself equally and authentically, in a variety of times and places. Rahner provides no reason for supposing that it would be impossible for God to do so, indeed, any notion of the impossibility of God's so doing must be at variance with the Christian axiom of the omnipotence of God. Rahner's reasons for supposing that God has not become incarnate, in the sense of offering himself in absolute self-communication, elsewhere, seem to be entirely based upon the belief that this idea would undermine what did take place in Jesus. I am not at all sure that such reasons are either plausible or sufficient. To use a human analogy, the achievement of any human being in any human sphere is not necessarily lessened by the achievement of another. Churchill does not become a "less great" Prime Minister if we have a great one now! Rahner in fact concedes something very similar when he writes, concerning saviour figures; *"...there is no reason...to*

write them off contemptuously, as if they stood in such contrast to faith in Jesus Christ as the eschatological, unsurpassable saviour, that they can only be judged negatively." 58.

However, he continues;

"...Saviour figures in the history of religion can only be viewed as signs that - since man is always and everywhere moved by the Spirit - he gazes in anticipation towards that event in which his absolute hope becomes historically irreversible and is manifested as such." 59.

In this way he writes, in effect, as if the judgement has already been made. [It must in fact be a prejudgment, since human history has not reached an end.] To return to our human analogy, what exactly is achieved by this kind of comparison? Logically, nothing is either added to or subtracted from the "greatness" of one Prime Minister by comparing him or her with another. Why should not the same be true of saviour figures? As Hick has pointed out, much depends on one's interpretation of "absolute." 60. It is perfectly possible for the absoluteness of Christianity to be compatible with the absoluteness of other faiths, if "absoluteness" is taken to mean the salvific sufficiency of the Gospel and the Christian way, for Christians. This, however, is not possible if "absolute" is understood as "unique." And this does seem to be Rahner's meaning for, *"...God's promise of himself as our salvation has become in Jesus a historical event in a unique and irreversible way."* 61.

The problem, here, is that if Christ is to be understood as unique, it is not easy to see how he can also be definitive and normative -the sticking point of Rahner's christology - since "normative" must surely be defined as an ideal type, which can be used to judge others by its own standard. Rahner certainly uses the idea of normativity in this way, by inviting, at least in theory, the comparison between Jesus and other possible saviour figures. 62. Just as there are different ways of interpreting the concept of "absoluteness", so there are different ways of interpreting the concept of "uniqueness". Paul Knitter has recently explored the context of Jesus' uniqueness in *"Jesus and the Other Names"*. Knitter defines "uniqueness" in terms of the qualities that make a person special and distinctive.

"...So the uniqueness of Jesus and the gospel is that without which Jesus would no longer act or speak the way he is portrayed in the New Testament, that without which we would no longer have the authentic, complete gospel". 63.

There is a sense, in this interpretation of uniqueness, that the concept is equally applicable to all persons, in that what is special and distinctive is not contained within the person, but, rather, radiates outwards and is centred upon the distinctiveness of the teaching. What is distinctive about Jesus is his message, centred upon the notion of the Kingdom of God, and the saving presence of God, offered to the poor and the oppressed of humanity. In the sense that Rahner interprets uniqueness, however, it seems to be centred upon the ontological significance of Jesus and is therefore by definition, very different, from Knitter's broad interpretation, which entails that, *"the questions I have asked about the uniqueness of Christ are neither intended to, nor do they have to, prove Christian superiority or enshrine an essence of Christianity"*. 64. Rahner's insistence on a narrowly interpreted unique ontological significance for Jesus is in tension with his claim for a normative ontological significance, for his interpretation of uniqueness seems to imply exclusivity, while his notion of normativity seems to invite comparison with others.

3.The Absoluteness of Christian Eschatology?

Essential to Rahner's entire theological enterprise is the idea of the comprehensiveness or totality of the Christian experience in the dimension of time.

"...Eschatology is not really an addition, but rather it gives expression once again to man as Christianity understands him.... basically he can say what he wants in his freedom only by saying what he freely hopes will be given to him and will be accepted by him in his freedom. Because of man's very nature, therefore, Christian anthropology is Christian futurology and Christian eschatology." 65.

The eschatological dimension, however, projects Christianity into the sphere of what is ultimate mystery, beyond time as humanly conceived, for *"...eternity subsumes time by being liberated from the time which came to be temporarily so that freedom and something of final and definitive validity can be achieved."* 66.

In one sense, as I have suggested, Rahner seeks to overcome some of the problems associated with the historical/critical method by means of Christian eschatology; through the Spirit, what happened in Jesus is of past, present and future significance, thus transcending the dimensions of mundane history. In another, however, his emphasis is very much upon the ineffable and mysterious nature of the eschaton, both individually, and collectively. He writes,

"...there is little chance of our being able to make an unambiguous statement about the more exact relationship between the fulfilment of an individual person through death, a fulfilment which is going on now continually, and the fulfilment of the human race and with it the fulfilment of the world, the world which has no other meaning to begin with except to be the realm of spiritual and personal history." 67.

Further, *"...in reality this absolute fulfilment remains a mystery which we have to worship in silence by moving beyond all images into the ineffable."* 68. There seems to be some tension between Rahner's insistence on the significance of the eschatological dimension of Christianity, while [rightly] conceding the unknown and unknowable nature of this sphere. If the final eschatological state is unknown to humankind, how can Rahner be so sure that specifically Christian affirmations are of ultimate significance, especially given the variety and diversity of these, and the uncertainty of Jesus' own eschatological predictions? In retreating into an ineffability thesis, is not Rahner in conflict with his own claim for Christianity, that inclusively yet uniquely, its eschatological dimension allows it to transcend the limitations of history?

The variety and diversity of eschatological views within Christianity is explicable both in terms of an inevitable acknowledgement of the ineffability of the final state, and in terms of the

contradictory and fragmentary nature of scripture in this sphere. It can be argued that the development of the Church's doctrinal statements regarding the afterlife has a basically improvisational character, largely due to the fact that Jesus seems to have left very little guidance on this matter. New Testament evidence suggests that, while he affirmed the afterlife, he was very imprecise regarding its nature, and that his thinking, and that of the Early Church, was dominated by an expectation of the imminent ending of the existing order. 69. The New Testament is full of references to the Parousia; it is not until the latest documents of the New Testament that the emphasis changes somewhat, to highlight the idea of Jesus' presence through the Spirit, with those who believe in him, and the timeless nature of God's plan for humanity. 70. [Sceptics, here, could argue with some justice, that expedients were being employed in connection with similar unfulfilled prophecies in earlier Judaism.] The Biblical evidence is certainly open to interpretation, and there have been some interesting hermeneutical developments regarding Jesus' own eschatological views. 71. It is undeniable that a great deal of scriptural evidence supports the view that Jesus did expect an imminent ending of the existing world order. This evidence regarding the timing of the event must be seen in contrast with the paucity of evidence regarding the nature of the afterlife, that can be attributed to Jesus' teaching. If Jesus did in fact expect an imminent ending of the existing world order, then this would imply that he was mistaken, and that in this matter his knowledge was humanly limited. It would also account for his imprecision regarding the nature of life beyond death, despite his positive affirmation of it.

From this point, it could be argued that the contemporary spectrum of Christian theology, which incorporates a wide variety and diversity of afterlife views, is attributable, at least in part, to the ambiguity and imprecision of the New Testament evidence itself. Christian scripture opens the door to theological speculation about the afterlife, and this would account for the range of theologies of death which have developed through the ages and are in the process of development to the present day. In view of this, ecclesiological statements regarding the afterlife ought to be more tentative and exploratory than they have been. In part, Rahner seems to acknowledge this, particularly with regard to his reservations regarding the traditional Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

"...Let me just call attention to the question whether in the Catholic notion of an "interval," which seems so obsolete at first, there could not be a starting point for coming to terms in a better and more positive way with the doctrine of "transmutation of souls" or of "reincarnation," which is so widespread in eastern cultures and is regarded there as something to be taken for granted. This is a possibility, at least on the presupposition that this reincarnation is not understood as a fate for man which will never end and will continue forever in time." 72.

My question is simply this; if Rahner can acknowledge so much, how can he equally claim normativity for Christian eschatological views? If we can say so little about the pareschaton, and ought to consider the insights of faiths outside the Christian tradition in this respect, we may arrive ultimately at an open-ended view of eschatology. And if this is so, the eschatological dimension of Rahner's christology, which he uses as a means to circumvent the problems associated with the historical/critical method, is ultimately flawed.

Conclusion

We have seen, in terms of our representative exclusivist and inclusivist Christian theologians, that there seems to be a certain tension between, on the one hand, their acceptance of some kind of divinely-willed general revelation, and on the other, their insistence on the "exclusiveness" or "uniqueness" or "normativeness" of Christ. Both make certain concessions to historical relativity, yet seem to want to claim a status for Christian revelation which is refuted by the historical process. Both demonstrate, to some degree, the human conditioning of their theological thinking, yet give insufficient weight to this, in its effect upon the theological positions they hold. In the next chapter, I return to Hick's pluralist answer to the question of the relationship of Christianity to other world faiths, examining his "Copernican Revolution" in some detail. I will attempt to demonstrate that, despite certain modifications which he has made since its formulation in the early 1970 's, his stance remains basically consistent with his fundamental theology of religious belief, formulated at the beginning of his academic career.

CHAPTER 2 NOTES.

1. J.P.Schineller. "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views". Theological Studies 37 [1976] 545-66. Ian Markham has also criticised this typology in "Creating Options: Shattering the Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Pluralist Paradigm". New Blackfriars, Vol.74, No.867 (January 1993.)
2. In Hick's more recent publications, including Problems of Religious Pluralism and An Interpretation of Religion he writes of a "Reality-Centred" universe rather than a theocentric universe, in order to refute the criticism that the Copernican Revolution as originally formulated, cannot accommodate non-theistic faiths such as Buddhism and Advaitin Hinduism.
3. J.Dupuais. Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1989. p.103.
4. In Christian Thought, its History and Application, Troeltsch writes,

"...this experience, [the Christian experience] is undoubtedly the criterion of its validity for us...But this does not preclude the possibility that other racial groups living under entirely different cultural conditions, may experience their contact with the Divine Life in quite a different way, and may possess a religion which has grown up with them and from which they cannot sever themselves so long as they remain what they are."

E.Troeltsch. Christian Thought, Its History and Application. London. University of London Press and New York. Meridian Books. 1957. p.26.
5. L.Newbigin. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. London. S.P.C.K. 1989. p.73.
6. *ibid.* p. 74.
7. *ibid.* p.57.
8. *ibid.* p.98.
9. *ibid.* p.62.

10. *ibid.* p.72.
11. *ibid.* p.57.
12. *ibid.* p.77.
13. *ibid.* p.71.
14. *ibid.* p.73.
15. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology. Michigan. Eerdmanns. 1978. p.75.
16. *ibid.* p.73.
17. *ibid.* p.89.
18. *ibid.* pp.95-96.
19. The legitimacy of such questions is not accepted by all exclusivist theologians, notably, Karl Barth. It is questionable how far Barth's theology is truly historical. He writes,

"...Revelation in the Bible means the self-unveiling to man, of the God who cannot by nature be unveiled to man. The element of self-unveiling in this definition may be described as the historical if not the logical or material centre of the biblical revelation. When the Bible speaks of revelation it does so in the form of the record of a history or a series of histories. The content of this history or of each of these histories, however, is the self-unveiling of God." Church Dogmatics.1.1. p.315.

Clearly, Barth asserts that God's revelation is actualized in history. But in locating revelation in history and seeing it as a historical event, it is surely necessary to accept the consequences of historical methodology. History asserts the uniqueness of all events, but requires that they be interpreted in relation to other events in time and place. Barth seems not to want to accept this. His "salvation history" is a "miracle of illumination," conceived within a unique category of history, exempt, it would seem, from the constraints of historical methodology. In its failure to conform to these constraints, it is arguable that it is fundamentally a-historical.
20. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret. p.99.

21. See, "Theology and the apprehension of Revelation," D.A.Pailin, The Anthropological Character of Theology. Conditioning Theological Understanding. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1990, chapter 6, particularly pp.128-129, "the particularity of revelation." A similar point is made by the New Testament scholar J.D.G.Dunn, when he writes, "there is no such thing in the New Testament as an absolute and unchanging form of the gospel which is independent of circumstance and occasion and which therefore can be abstracted from the New Testament for use in every and any circumstance thereafter." J.D.G Dunn. The Living Word. London. S.C.M. 1987. p.17.
22. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret.p.94.
23. *ibid.* p.99.
24. G.D.Kaufman. The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God. Philadelphia. Westminster Press. 1981. pp.182-189.
25. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret. p.185.
26. *ibid.* p.188, quoted from Hick in God and the Universe of Faiths. p.131. [Newbigin's emphases.]
27. *ibid.* pp.184-185.
28. *ibid* p. 188.
29. It is a plausible hypothesis that Barth's theology was considerably influenced in this way, and must be understood within the context of the prevailing "plausibility structure" of his times. The publication of the Commentary on Paul's letter to Rome in 1922, which marked his complete detachment from the theology of Nineteenth Century liberalism, coincided with the historical period immediately following the debacle of World War 1. This was, inevitably, a period of confusion and disillusionment with the belief in a human ability to promote peace and selfless love. Barth implicitly recognizes the anthropological conditioning of his own theological thinking in such statements as,

*"...It was like the twilight of the gods when I saw the reaction of
Harnack, Hermann, Rade, Eucken and company and discovered*

how religion and scholarship could be changed completely into intellectual 42 cm. cannons."

Also,

"...a whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching which I had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy was shaken to the foundations, and, with it, all the other writings of the German theologians."

E.Busch. Karl Barth, his Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts. (trans. J.Bowden). London. S.C.M.1976. p.81.

Here, Barth is referring to the declaration made by ninety three German intellectuals , of solidarity with the war policy of the Kaiser and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg. For Barth, such a declaration in the crisis of war amounted to the total ethical failure of German theology. Hence, his radical departure from Nineteenth Century Liberalism can, at least in part be attributed to his human experience in the historical times in which he lived.

30. G.D.Kaufman. In Face of Mystery. A Constructive Theology. Cambridge, Massachusetts. London, England. Harvard University Press. 1993. p.105

31. ibid p.267

32. ibid p.455

33. K.Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity. London. Darton, Longman and Todd. 1978. p.33.

34. ibid. p.216.

35. ibid. p.225.

36. ibid. pp.217-218.

37. ibid. p.201.

38. ibid. p.218-219.

39. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. Vol.16. London. Darton, Longman and Todd. N.York. Seabury Press. 1984. p.209.

40. ibid. p.209.

41. *ibid.* p.317.
42. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. Vol.16. p.214.
43. K. Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith. p.432.
44. *ibid.* pp.240-241.
45. *ibid.* p.52.
46. *ibid.* p.233.
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.* p.234.
49. *ibid.* p.237.
50. *ibid.* p.33.
51. K.Heinz-Weger. Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Theology. [trans. D.Smith] London. Burns and Oates. 1980. p.6.
52. It is by no means easy to categorize theologians by means of the exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist model in relation to Incarnational theology. Paul Tillich, for example, generally considered to be an inclusivist, strenuously rejects the Chalcedonian formulation. He states:

" ...The assertion that God has become man is not a paradoxical but a non-sensical statement. It is a combination of words which makes sense only if it is not meant to mean what the words say. The word "God" points to ultimate reality, and even the most consistent Scotists had to admit that the only thing God cannot do is cease to be God. But that is just what the assertion that "God has become man " means.

P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. Vol. 2. London. Nisbet. 1968. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1963. p.109.
53. K.Heinz-Weger. Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Theology. p.145.
54. For example, I.Howard Marshall, while upholding a relatively "high" Christology, believes that Jesus was extremely reticent in making claims for himself; it is unlikely, in his view, that Jesus ever claimed to be the self-communication of God to man, or the Son Incarnate, or any

- of the titles asserted by "high" Christology. I. Howard Marshall. The Origins of New Testament Christology. Leicester. Inter Varsity Press. Leicester. 1976. This view is shared by Hick in God and the Universe of Faiths. p.114, also, to some extent, by J.D.G.Dunn, The Evidence for Jesus. London. S.C.M. 1985, and Christology in the Making. London. S.C.M. 1980.
55. B.Marshall. Christology in Conflict. Oxford. Basil Blackwell. 1987. pp.4-5.
 56. ibid. p.56
 57. K.Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith. p.218.
 58. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. Vol.17. p.56.
 59. ibid. p.50.
 60. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.46.
 61. K.Rahner and W.Thusing. A New Christology. London. Burns and Oates. 1980. p.9. [my emphasis.]
 62. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. Vol.17. p.50.
 63. P.Knitter. Jesus and the other Names. Christian Mission and Global Responsibility. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1996. p.85
 64. ibid. p.84.
 65. K.Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith. p.431.
 66. ibid. p.437.
 67. ibid. p.446.
 68. ibid. p.434.
 69. Mark. 9.1. Matthew. 16.28. Luke. 9.27. 1.Thessalonians. 4. 15-18. 1.Corinthians. 15. 51-52.
 70. 2.Peter. 3. 3-10.
 71. See J.Bowden. Jesus: The Unanswered Questions, for an interesting discussion of the interpretation of the biblical evidence relating to Jesus' eschatological views. Bowden draws attention to Professor Dodd's manipulation of the text, specifically Mark 9.1. in the New English Bible. This text, which in the Revised Standard Version reads, "There are some

standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" has become "There are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God already come with power." Bowden's point is that the subtle alteration of verb tenses does much to bend the text in the direction of Dodd's view that Jesus did not preach of an imminent ending of the world order. How far such a manipulation of the text is either legitimate or plausible, is, as Bowden suggests, debatable. J.Bowden. Jesus: The Unanswered Questions. London. S.C.M. 1988. pp.136-137.

72. K.Rahner. Foundation of Christian Faith. p.442.

CHAPTER 3

The Copernican Revolution and its Philosophical and Anthropological Roots: the Development and Consistency of Hick's Theology of Religious Pluralism.

As Hick's career has developed, it is possible to discern a marked increase in his acknowledgement of the anthropological character of theology. He states that he sees theology as a human activity, the means by which men and women have sought to confer meaning upon certain events in history, and to place them within a conceptual and metaphysical framework.

"...theology is a creation of the human mind...Theology begins with religious experience - the experience of encountering God in Christ in one's own life - and then tries systematically and consistently to interpret this and to relate it to our other knowledge." 1.

Hick's conceptual analysis of what theology is has remained consistent up to the present time. In his recent publication, The Metaphor of God Incarnate he has written;

"...theology is a human creation. It is the product of devout and faithful men and women [but in fact nearly always, in the past, men], some of them extremely intelligent and thoughtful and others less so, who were, like everyone else, enabled and yet also limited by the presuppositions and cognitive resources of a particular time and place." 2.

As a historical phenomenon, theology is necessarily influenced by human culture and is subject to change and reconstruction in relation to the relative slowness or rapidity of change during any historical period. The Twentieth Century has been a period of rapid change, and therefore correspondingly rapid reconstruction within Christian theology. Two central issues have had to be faced; the relationship between Christianity and contemporary scientific knowledge, and the relationship between Christianity and other world faiths. It is to the latter problem that Hick

addresses himself, in formulating his "Copernican Revolution." Between 1966 and 1972, we discover a significant change in Hick's Christology, from the views he expressed in Faith and Knowledge, and, in alignment with this, a shift in his stance as regards the relationship of Christianity to other world faiths. In an article, "Christ and Incarnation", first published in 1966, he states that the perceivable diversity of human religious experience seems to call a shift from a Christ centred view of the Universe of faiths, to a God Centred view. 3. In 1970, in an article, "The Reconstruction of Christian Belief for Today and Tomorrow", again he emphasises the fact that all theology is a creation of the human mind and, extrapolating from this, paves the way for a radical reinterpretation of the doctrine of Incarnation which, by then, he believed to be open to serious doubt as it was formulated and enshrined as doctrine by its human creators in the Third and Fourth centuries of the Christian era. 4. In alignment with the fact that Christian doctrine has developed and been revised and reinterpreted according to changing historical and sociological conditions, he predicts further radical changes in Christian self-understanding, but qualifies this by insisting on the centrality of Jesus as the focus of Christian faith.

"...So long as the person of Jesus of Nazareth is remembered, and gives rise to a continuing faith-response, the men and women in whom the faith-response occurs will be the Church, and the ways in which they conceptualise their faith will be Christian Theologies" 5.

In 1972, in the article "The Christian View of Other Faiths", he calls for a "Copernican Revolution" in theology. 6.

The Copernican Revolution in the theology of religions is, in essence, a history of Hick's growing dissatisfaction with traditional Christian exclusiveness in the context of Twentieth Century knowledge of other world faiths. Hick believes we find ourselves, at this period in history, living in the reality of "One World." The development of systems of communication has led to a situation in which it is no longer possible, as hitherto, to be unaware of man's experience of religion outside the Christian tradition. The movement of peoples and the influx of immigrants to

the western world has brought about a need to redefine Christian attitudes to non-Christians. The ordinary man or woman has an awareness of religious pluralism that would have been unimaginable as little as a hundred years ago. In the sphere of religious knowledge, eighteenth and nineteenth century oriental scholars have done much to bring about a greater understanding of the religions of the East, through the translation from the Sanskrit and Pali of Buddhist and Hindu texts.

In the context of these developments, Hick found it necessary to reconstruct his own position as a theologian. In response to Western knowledge of the plurality of man's religious experience, he began to formulate what he has called a "global theology of religions." For him, the problem is in essence a simple one; each religion that professes itself to be objectively true is, by implication, stating that other faiths are untrue, or true only in so far as they approximate to its own truth criteria. For Christianity, the fact of seeing itself as the only true faith cannot be reconciled with the Christian understanding of God, whose love for humankind is said to be universal, and who is held to desire the salvation of all men and women. Hick has taken the stance that it is impossible, given the universal salvific will of God, to conceive that he has ordained salvation in such a way that it is only possible for a small minority of people, i.e. Christians, to benefit from it. 7. He believes Christianity cannot escape from this unpalatable truth which it draws for itself from its own axioms. For Hick, the concept of the universal salvific will of God is incompatible with what he believes to be the exclusiveness of the Christian faith. Since "a religion" is not an exclusive entity but simply a cultural human form, it is compatible with the idea of a global theology for a plurality of religions to continue to exist, as expressions of the diversity of mankind's religious experience. Each is, or may be, a path towards a Divine Reality that may be conceived as personal or impersonal, according to the cultural norms of the various human communities. The common factor within each religious tradition is that each sees itself as a path towards salvation, liberation or enlightenment. Thus, for Hick, the common factor among the world faiths is soteriological 8.

In formulating his Copernican Revolution, Hick draws an analogy from astronomy, describing the shift that was made in man's understanding of the nature of the Universe and his own place in it. Ptolemaic astronomy consisted of a belief that the earth was the centre of the Universe, and that the planets revolved around it. The Copernican revolution in astronomy was the realization that, in fact, the sun is at the centre, and all planets of the solar system, including planet earth, revolve around it. Hick has called for a similar revolution in theology, to a realization that God, [or "Ultimate Reality," as he later stated] is at the centre, and that all the religions of the world, including Christianity, serve him and are equally true and valid.

"...the needed Copernican revolution in theology involves an equally radical transformation in our conception of the universe of faiths and the place of our own religion within it. It involves a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realisation that it is God who is at the centre, and that all religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him." 9.

Hick's Copernican Revolution explicitly rejects the exclusivist position, which he believes is exemplified by the ancient Christian axiom, *"...outside the Church, or outside Christianity, there is no salvation."* 10. This, he believes, is incompatible with the equally venerable Christian axiom of God's universal salvific love. He also rejects the positions of inclusivist Christian theologians such as Karl Rahner, who attempt to affirm the presence of God in non-Christian faiths, while maintaining that Christ is the definitive and normative revelation of God. Hick compares such attempts to the "dubious epicycles" by which the ancient Ptolemaic astronomy was upheld, until it was recognized as wholly implausible.

"...Clearly Rahner is struggling valiantly to do justice to the reality of religious faith outside Christianity; but equally clearly he has not been able to face the Copernican revolution that is required and has instead only contributed yet another ingenious epicycle to the old Ptolemaic theology." 11.

Hick freely acknowledges the personal and experiential roots of his radical revision in theological thinking. He states in God and the Universe of Faiths that the problem of Christianity's relationship with other world faiths was one that he had, in effect, ignored, or simply failed to recognize through a reluctance to face the implication of exclusivist Christianity, until he lived in the multi-faith city of Birmingham. ¹² In Problems of Religious Pluralism, published in 1985, he acknowledges the anthropological basis of his philosophical and theological thinking in stating;

"...a philosopher is a human being, living through the history of his or her time, and it may be of interest to some to see another small example of the way in which life influences and is influenced by thought." ¹³.

He then devotes Chapter 1 to the three controversies in his personal and academic life that have influenced and been influenced by his theological thinking. In fact one of the central and most significant observations that seems to have influenced Hick's theology is the simple fact that, in the vast majority of cases, the religious adherence of the individual is determined by birth. ¹⁴ Since this is the case, the proposition that there is, or could be, one "true Church," guardian of the monopoly of religious truth, is unacceptable simply because equality of opportunity would be patently lacking, in obtaining access to this truth, and this notion is therefore inconsistent with the concept of a God of Love.

It is important to note, however, that in stating that religious belief is almost always a function of birth, Hick is simply stating what he [and everyone else] observes to be the case empirically. He would not wish to imply that, therefore, any sincerely held belief is necessarily true; in writing of Nazism, warlock worship or witchcraft, [which might be held to be true by persons born within these "traditions,"] he states; *"...to say that whatever is sincerely believed and practised is, by definition, true, would be the end of all critical discrimination, both intellectual and moral."* ¹⁵.

Clearly, in relation to the "truths" of religious traditions, there must be some criteria relating to the efficacy of such traditions in promoting the spiritual and moral development of the individual. Hick's position, in relation to what he has called the "grading of religions" is that,

"...the basic criterion is the extent to which they promote or hinder the great religious aim of salvation/liberation...that limitlessly better quality of human existence which comes about in the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness." 12.

It is, however, Hick's present belief, outlined in An Interpretation of Religion, published in 1989, that, as far as human judgement is able to discern, each tradition is in fact more or less equally effective in bringing about such a transformation. 17. He does suggest, however, *"...the possibility of systematic moral criticism within each tradition of its own inherited doctrines."* 18.

Hick has recently reiterated his view that religious traditions must be judged according to moral criteria, in response to the legitimate question posed by D'Costa; how do we judge that certain quasi-religious movements such as Nazism and the Jim Jones cult are not authentic responses to the Divine? 19. Hick believes,

"The answer is that this criterion is a basic moral insight which Christians have received from Christian teachings, Jews from Jewish teachings, Buddhists from Buddhist teachings and so on." 20.

In citing moral criteria as a means of judging religions he does not concede the main point of D'Costa's article, that, *"pluralism must always logically be a form of exclusivism and nothing called pluralism really exists."* 21.

Hick holds that the concept of religious pluralism is a broad, useful term used in description of a viable Christian response to other world faiths. He concedes that the acceptance of any theory or viewpoint is, in effect, a denial of the contrary, but believes it is misleading and unhelpful to imply therefore that religious pluralism must by definition be exclusivist, simply because criteria of judgement are employed in discerning what is a genuinely religious response to Divine Reality. 22.

Hick is surely correct in his assertion that, as a broad categorical term, the notion of religious pluralism conveys meaning both to its adherents and his opponents.

It would seem that the pluralist position need not involve the complete relativization of religious truth but requires, instead, the formulation of objective criteria for critically assessing the doctrines of faiths in terms of their soteriological effectiveness. It will form an important part of the focus of Part 2 of this study, to assess how far this may be a viable possibility. From the observations above, however, it is clear that, since 1973, Hick has in fact revised and redefined his Copernican Revolution on several occasions in response to criticisms that have inevitably been directed towards his very radical proposals for the revision of traditional Christianity. We shall examine some of the initial criticisms of Hick's proposals for a "theological revolution," before turning to the wider issue of the grounding of his theological developments in Kantian epistemology, which has subsequently been developed to a greater extent, and has also been subject to criticism.

Criticisms of the Copernican Revolution as originally formulated

In brief, these consist of objections that the Copernican Revolution devalues the essential tenets of Christianity and that it is theologically unsound, for the very axiom used by Hick to justify it, belief in the universal salvific will of God, is an axiom that derives directly from traditional Christology, and cannot be severed from it. 23. Further, that the Copernican Revolution, which originally placed God at the centre of the "solar system" of faiths, is unable to accommodate non-theistic faiths such as Buddhism or Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, on their own terms. 24.

As far as the first criticism is concerned, the idea that the doctrine of an all-loving God requires grounding in Christology, since it is from Christ that we know it, could only be valid if other faiths did not assert that God's love for humankind is universal. It could be claimed, however, that universalism is central to the three major monotheistic traditions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism. 25. Against this, it has been argued that non-Christian concepts of God are not necessarily compatible with the Christian understanding of God, and that it is questionable whether it is in fact possible to abstract "doctrines of God" from the historical and cultural conditions in which he is disclosed. 26. This is surely a valid point, but one which strengthens the thesis that all theological

thinking is anthropologically conditioned, far more positively, I believe, than it undermines universalism. What cannot be claimed, within Christianity, is that all Christian sects and denominations have, historically, always asserted the universal salvific will of God, apparently rooted in the revelation in Christ. This would not be true, for example, of the Calvinist notion of predestination, described by Weber, however much it may be claimed by present-day inclusivist Christian theologians. 27. In fact, it could equally be argued that it is precisely because of the tension that arises between the Christian axiom of an all-loving God, and the belief that salvation is only obtained through Christ, that it has been found necessary to adopt devices such as Rahner's "anonymous Christian" theory, in relation to the salvation of non-Christians, in order that the concept of an all-loving God can be in any way credible. For although inclusivists such as Rahner and D'Costa may assert, as Christians, that their knowledge of the universal salvific will of God is grounded in Christology, the actual existence of such a salvific will must have been present prior to God's self-disclosure in Christ and must be present now unknown to non-Christians. Given the axiom of the universal salvific will of God, it is implausible that this is actually dependent upon the event of Christ's life, death and resurrection, although, for Christians, the Christ event constitutes the means by which it is revealed. The salvific will of God "as it exists in itself" must surely be dependent upon the relationship between God the Creator, and men and women, the created.

Rahner, as we have seen, gives assent to the idea of there being a general revelation, accessible to all men and women, through the very nature of human consciousness, which is so constituted that it reaches out towards the mystery of God.

"...For we can say what man is only if we say what he has to do with and what concerns him. But in the case of man who is a transcendental subject this is something which is boundless, something which is nameless, and ultimately it is about the mystery whom we call God...When we have said everything which can be expressed about ourselves which is definable and

calculable, we have not said anything about ourselves unless in all that is said we have also included that we are beings who are orientated towards the God who is incomprehensible." 28.

If Rahner believes this to be true, he cannot, without undermining his own axioms about the nature of human beings, equally assert that the existence of the salvific will of God is dependent on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Were he to do so, the idea of general revelation and the orientation of men and women towards the mystery of God, through the transcendental nature which is the essence of what it is to be human, would become meaningless. Furthermore, if God's salvific will is eternal, universal and immutable, one must assume its existence in pre-Christian times. How could human beings have received God's salvation, before any possibility of knowledge of Jesus, if knowledge is to determine salvation? If God has created human beings equally, and if they have an innate orientation towards him, it must be through the nature of the relationship between God and humanity, determined by God, that salvation is constituted.

This line of thinking has been elaborated by S.M. Ogden, who holds, against exclusivists and inclusivists, that while Jesus is representative of the possibility of salvation, he cannot be constitutive of it, for the only cause of salvation is the primordial and everlasting love of God.

"...no event in time or history, including the event of Jesus of Jesus Christ, can be the cause of salvation in the sense of the necessary condition of its possibility. On the contrary, any event, including the Christ event, can be at most a consequence of the salvation, the sole necessary condition of the possibility of which is God's own essential being as all-embracing love." 29.

This stance, as Ogden notes, is contrary to the satisfaction theory of atonement, by which it is held that salvation becomes possible by the atoning action and obedience of Christ, particularly his death, which reconciles the Creator with his creation. By means of this theory, the Christ event is seen as the cause of salvation. As we have seen, Rahner, also, finds difficulty in accepting the satisfaction theory of atonement. If "cause" means, "to bring about a change," this theory, according to Rahner; *"...all but inevitably insinuates the idea of a fundamental change in the mind*

of God, which is metaphysically impossible, and obscures the origin of the cross as a consequence of God's forgiving love." 30.

To this extent, Rahner would be in agreement with Ogden. But if this is the case, his own theory of causation borders on being self-contradictory. If he views the cross as a consequence of God's love, this must logically entail that the Christ event is representative of salvation, rather than constitutive of it. Rahner, however, does not abandon a constitutive type of christology, but retains it with some difficulty, by distinguishing between the idea of the efficient cause of God's universal salvific will, which he rejects, in favour of the idea of the final cause of God's will, the instigation of the universal primal sacrament of the salvation of the whole world.

As we saw in chapter 2, Rahner's use of the idea of "cause" is somewhat esoteric, he uses it in the sense of a sign, or symbol, rather than in the more usual sense of "that which brings something about."

"...If salvation history is irreversibly directed in this sense to salvation, and not to damnation, through a concrete event, then this historically tangible occurrence must be a sign of the salvation of the whole world, in the sense of a "real symbol" and so possesses a type of causality where salvation is concerned."

31.

Rahner writes as if the occurrence of the historically tangible event, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is constitutive of salvation. Nevertheless, it does not seem to me that this interpretation of the significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, absolves Rahner from the need to make a clear distinction between cause and consequence. Rahner's blurring of the distinction between them is not helpful, in that one is left wondering, what type of causality in relation to salvation could Rahner be thinking of? Logically, it seems to me that the juxtaposition of Rahner's idea of the transcendental nature of humanity, reaching out to the everlasting and universal love of God, entails that salvation is consequential of this universal and redeeming love,

even if the event of Christ is seen as a real sign or symbol of it. Rahner seems to argue as if cause and consequence are the same thing, which cannot be the case. Something may be a cause or a consequence of something else, but it cannot be both. For example, as a consequence of the earth's revolution, we experience the phenomena of night and day, but it cannot equally be argued that day and night cause the earth's revolution. [Though they may be an experiential sign of it.] Certainly it can be argued, as inclusivists frequently do, that it is because of the events of Christ's life and death that we as Christians have knowledge of God's salvific will. 32. But knowledge is essentially peripheral to either cause or consequence, for, to employ the same analogy, the cause of the earth's revolution will produce the consequence of night and day whether or not I, or anyone else [while experiencing the consequence] has any knowledge whatsoever of the cause. We are driven back, I submit, to the idea of the primordial and everlasting love of God as the cause of salvation, and the events of Christ's life and death [and, at least in theory, other events] as being representative of it.

As regards the second criticism, it is true that, as it was originally formulated and outlined, the Copernican Revolution could only with difficulty accommodate non-theistic faiths such as Buddhism and Advaitin Hinduism, which would be unable to accept the replacement of "Christ at the Centre" with "God at the Centre." Yet, from the outset, in God and the Universe of Faiths, Hick was clearly aware of this precise problem, tentatively suggesting that the different human apprehensions of, and responses to the Divine can be accounted for in terms of the isolated and fragmented nature of the developing human communities in history. Each faith, in its experiential roots, may be in contact with the same Ultimate Reality. 33. In response to criticisms centring on this issue, Hick formulated what has been called the "Copernican Epicycle." 34. He believes the Kantian framework he has since elaborated in support of religious pluralism overcomes the difficulty of the acceptability of the Copernican Revolution to non-theistic faiths. 35. This is not to say, however, that the so-called "Kantian Epicycle" is in any real way inconsistent with the original thinking of the Copernican Revolution, or that it constitutes a radical reformulation of the original hypothesis for a pluralist theology of religions, for, as we saw in Chapter 1, a Kantian

philosophical framework underpins Hick's theology of religious belief itself. Hick gives increased emphasis to Kant's epistemological model in "An Interpretation of Religion", 1989, but in 1973 he implicitly accepted a Kantian-type limitation of the possibilities of human knowledge in stating, *"...the recognition, which is made in all the main religious traditions, is that the ultimate divine reality is infinite and as such transcends the grasp of the human mind."* 36.

Thus he has consistently emphasized the fact that the limitations of human understanding are such that all concepts of God, or Infinite Reality, whether conceived personally or impersonally, are partial, incomplete images, and that it is simply not given to human beings, in this life, to know the totality of the truth, beyond human interpretation of it. Kant's philosophy of the nature of human knowledge is the linchpin of Hick's theology of rational theistic belief; human moral and religious experience is a postulate of the existence of God, but knowledge of God is limited. Since, in the development of his theology of religious pluralism, Hick has placed more emphasis on Kantian epistemology than was the case initially, it is worth examining his thesis as it now stands in some detail, in order to assimilate its implications.

As we saw in Chapter 1 it is Hick's contention that all experience is inherently interpretive; he develops from Wittgenstein's notion of "seeing-as," the notion of "experiencing-as" 37. All experience, including religious experience, is interpreted by the human mind by means of historical and cultural factors which act as a kind of grid or filter; the cognizing set of the human mind determines how the particular experience will be interpreted. The development of Hick's thesis has, however, been more heavily reliant on Kant than on Wittgenstein, therefore it is appropriate to quote him at some length as regards this development of his epistemological model. He writes;

"...For Kant's broad theme, recognising the mind's own positive contribution to the character of its perceived environment, has been massively confirmed as an empirical thesis by modern work in cognitive and social psychology and in the sociology of knowledge." 38.

While acknowledging that Kant himself did not apply his own insights to the epistemology of religion, Hick makes an analogy between Kant's theory of the forms and categories of perception, and our perception of religious phenomena;

"...Analogously, I want to say that the noumenal Real is experienced and thought by different human mentalities, forming and formed by different religious traditions, as the range of gods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religion reports. And these divine personae and metaphysical impersonae, as I shall call them, are not illusory but are empirically, that is experientially, real as authentic manifestations of the Real." 39.

It is important to note that Hick clearly affirms the existence of the noumenal Real as the source and grounding of authentic religious experience; such experience, as we noted in chapter 1, he believes to be veridical, rejecting the idea that it is the result of human projection. He continues to expound his epistemology of religion, based on Kant in the following way:

"...one can say that the Real is experienced by human beings, but experienced in a manner analogous to that in which, according to Kant, we experience the world: namely, by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorial scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experience. All that we are entitled to say about the noumenal source of this information is that it is the reality whose influence produces, in collaboration with the human mind, the phenomenal world of our experience." 40.

It appears that the heart of Hick's epistemological model is the distinction between an entity "as it is in itself," and the same entity as it appears to human perception. The distinction between the "noumenal world," which exists independently and beyond man's perception, and the "phenomenal world," as experienced by human consciousness, can be used, Hick believes, to reinforce the

pluralist hypothesis. The "phenomenal religions" represent the partial, incomplete and humanly limited apprehension of the "noumenal Real" which is beyond the limits of human understanding. Again, it must be emphasized that Hick is not saying that every image of God, or Infinite Reality is necessarily equally valid; inter-religious dialogue must proceed according to a quest to determine objective criteria for judging religious truth claims and the soteriological efficacy of religious traditions. He is saying, however, that each tradition shows a partial insight into the nature of the "noumenon," as far as human judgement is able to discern. The sense of the Divine which is conceived as non-personal "Ultimate Reality" and "Nirvana" in Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism, reflects aspects of the same reality that is experienced as God in Western traditions and some schools of Hinduism such as Madhva and Ramanuja. Each can only be a partial, interpretative aspect of the totality of the Real, in terms of the Kantian epistemological model of the limitations of human knowledge. By using this model, Hick is able to counter the criticism that the Copernican Revolution is unacceptable to non-theistic traditions on their own terms, and is also able to distance himself from the Advaitin belief that God is ultimately non-personal. The Kantian framework, he believes, allows him to transcend both these views.

Grounds for Criticism of Hick's Epistemology

1. The Charge of Agnosticism

As we saw above, Hick's epistemological model does entail that knowledge of God is humanly limited. He further elaborates upon this limitation.

"...This distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as it is thought and experienced through human religious concepts entails... that we cannot apply to the Real an sich the characteristics encountered in its personae and impersonae. Thus it cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, conscious or unconscious, purposive or non-purposive, substance or process, good or evil, loving or hating. None of the descriptive terms that

apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the unexperienceable reality that underlies that realm." 33.

Critics have stated that Hick's Kantian epistemology runs into serious difficulties, and ultimately, rests upon agnostic presuppositions. 42. The argument tends to run on the lines that Hick's thesis entails that nothing meaningful can be said about "the Real"; its very ontological status is indeterminate, if we can say neither that it is personal nor impersonal.

Hick has, however, replied to D'Costa's criticism on these lines, in terms of drawing a distinction between agnosticism and ineffability. While we cannot characterise precisely that which is by definition beyond human experience and conceptualization, we can affirm a realist position in relation to the existence of a Transcendent Reality.

"...In Western terms, the Ultimate is ineffable, not describable in human terms. But this does not mean that the concept of Real is a mere blank. It is the concept of the inexperienceable and indescribable ground of the range of human projection. The Real is that which there must be if this range of experience is not in toto delusory." 43.

More recently he has written,

"...to say that the real is ineffable is not to commit the logical indiscretion of saying that we cannot characterize it at all, even in purely formal ways; for we have already done so in saying that it is ineffable! It means that we cannot properly attribute intrinsic qualities to it. But, again, this does not mean that it is an empty blank; it means that it's nature, infinitely rich in itself, cannot be expressed in our human concepts." 44.

Further, he distinguishes the position of the religious pluralist very clearly from that of the non-realist.

"...the difference between a pluralistic religious understanding of religion and the various non - and anti-realist understanding of it,

is the difference between affirming and denying an ultimate transcendent Reality, which is the ground and source of everything and which enters our human experience in the different ways made possible by the thought and practice of the different religions. In contrast to this, the non-realist thinkers deny that there is any such transcendent reality." 45.

Critics, have paid too little attention to the distinction which must be made between agnosticism and ineffability; certainly it must be conceded that Hick's thesis points clearly towards the idea of religious truth as ineffable; all human attempts to define the Real and to express religious truth within the confines of doctrinal structures and belief systems are seen as inadequate human attempts to define and express the indefinable and inexpressible. The incomprehensibility of God is a theme that may be discerned in Christian and non-Christian thought, and Hick draws upon the thinking of Moses Maimonides, Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Thomas Aquinas in support of his thesis. 46. He also refers, in a note, to the religious philosophy of Rudolph Otto, whose contention is that the idea of the holy is common to all religions, but that this, which he signified by the term, "numinous," cannot be fully understood or analyzed, because it *"completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts."* 47. In order to safeguard the idea of transcendence of God, some concept of ineffability is inevitable; critics acknowledge this, while tending to suggest that too strong an ineffability thesis implies that nothing meaningful can be said about God, or the Real, and that therefore talk about Him /Her it lapses into incoherence. One could counter this charge by the observation that too weak an ineffability thesis runs an equally grave risk of undermining the transcendence of God by delimiting and defining him within purely human constructs; there is a certain irony in the Christian assertion that the ontological status of God is such that he cannot be both personal and impersonal, while firmly asserting that his ontological status is such that he can be both man and God. As regards the charge that this emphasis upon the "unknowability" of the Real entails that nothing meaningful can be said about it, Hick's reply is that talk of God/the Real is made meaningful by the range of religious mythologies which have been developed within the

great traditions, to span the epistemic distance between the noumenal Real and the various humanly limited phenomenal manifestations of it.

"...This relationship between the ultimate noumenon and its multiple phenomenal appearances, or between the limitless transcendent reality and our many partial images of it, makes possible mythological speech about the Real." 48.

How far Hick's notion of mythological truth is able to counter this particular criticism is a matter we shall investigate fully in the next chapter, which commences with an examination of Hick's understanding of the nature of myth in religious belief and discourse.

Several questions still remain; is Hick's Kantian epistemological framework actually appropriately used in support of the pluralist hypothesis, and how far can such a radical revision of Christian self-understanding be deemed to remain truly Christian? The enormity of the latter question demands a chapter in its own right; I shall attempt to answer it in Chapter 4, which is concerned with Hicks's revision of traditional incarnational Christology. In terms of the justification for the use of Kantian insights into the nature of human knowledge, it cannot be denied that much of what Hick is saying is in accordance with modern empiricist philosophy. However, this use of the Kantian distinction between the "noumenal real" existing independently and outside man's perception of it, and the "phenomenal real" as we experience it, has been criticized, as was Kant's original thesis. Is it possible for Kant, or Hick, to assert that there is a noumenon inextricably linked to the various phenomena, since it has been argued that the very existence of conflicting truth claims leads to the sceptics' response that, in all probability, none of them are true? Further, does not this epistemological model, as applied to theology, severely underestimate the human capacity to know things "as they are in themselves," through the exercise of experience, understanding and judgement? We shall examine each of these criticisms in turn.

2. The Kantian Epistemological Model as an invitation to Scepticism

Hick is of course aware of Hume's argument on these lines;

"...in matters of religion whatever is different is contrary...in destroying a rival system it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established." 49.

In fact, Hume's argument is extremely damaging to any kind of exclusive religious truth claims, but if anything, can be used in support of a pluralist hypothesis, if whatever is different is not considered contrary, but is acknowledged to be a partial, incomplete truth. The distinction between "truth" and "untruth" is too rigid in Hume's argument, which seems to imply that the very existence of religious plurality is an invitation to the sceptic's response, which is to deny truth to any religious tradition, as a more plausible possibility than allowing that all may be partially true. Although admittedly, religions have tended to couch their truth claims in absolute terms, this is in itself a denial of the subtlety and complexity of the concept of truth as it is understood in ordinary human experience and in other academic disciplines. For example, the historian would be dissatisfied with the idea of explaining the "truth" of the causes of the Second World War solely with reference to Hitler's will to power, or to Chamberlain's misjudgments, or to the economic situation in Germany, or to the shortcomings of the Treaty of Versailles. He or she would argue, rather, that the combination of these factors encapsulate "the whole truth." Nevertheless, each statement, taken singly, is still a statement of truth, since each statement is one of cognitive fact. "Truth" should be viewed in the context of both/and, rather than either/or; the latter model denies the complexity and plurality of truth itself and, in matters of religion, certainly invites a sceptical response. But scepticism, I would argue, may actually be diminished, through an acknowledgement of the partial character of many truths, and realization of the complementary character of phenomenological religions .

3. The Kantian Epistemological Model as undermining Human Judgement

Hick's grounding of epistemology in Kant has been criticised by G.H. Carruthers, who believes that both Kant and Hick drastically minimize the human capacity to know "things as they are in themselves" through the exercise of experience, understanding and judgement. He believes Kant

underestimates the component in the complex process of knowledge which we call judgement. He writes;

"...Judgement does not occur on the level of extroverted knowing.

Rather, it is part, indeed a crucially constitutive part of the dynamic process of genuine human knowing. That dynamism goes beyond the question for intelligence, ie. beyond "What is it?" to the question for judgement, "Is it true: yes or no?"...It aims not at description, that is, not at things as they appear to the knower.

It aims at things in themselves. Judgement intends what is true, what is real." 50.

While I would agree that the intention of judgement is to arrive at what is true, I would argue that, nevertheless, human judgement is elevated to an absolute status that cannot be justified, when it is viewed as an indicator of what is incontrovertibly the truth. This is because the concept of judgement in itself presupposes the existence of reasonable alternatives and the making of choices between them. Further, human experience leads us to the knowledge that judgement may be incorrect; frequently, it is only with hindsight that we know, unquestionably, whether our judgement has been correct or incorrect. [As Hick would argue, we may only know the truths of religion, incontrovertibly, in the eschaton.] The variability of human experience in fact predetermines the variability of human judgement on a whole host of issues, including the truths of religion; for this reason, Carruthers' idea of "experiencing, understanding and judging" is problematic, for it seems to presuppose that, on the basis of experience and understanding, we will all arrive at the same judgement of what is the truth. This is clearly so very far from being the case that I believe that Carruthers is mistaken in his own judgement and seriously overestimates the human ability to "know things in themselves" ie. to arrive at noumenal truth in matters of religion by the exercise of judgement. True, he concedes that it is only because God has chosen to reveal Himself that we may know Him as he is in Himself; *"...if God chooses to reveal Himself fully, God can be known in-Himself, even if it is only as ultimate Triune mystery."* 51. However, to invoke the idea of Christian Revelation as the confirmation of the correctness of human

judgement in matters of religious truth avails very little, because it is precisely the fact of contrary and contradictory revelation within other faiths [which are judged to be true by their adherents] that calls into question the likelihood of human inerrancy in matters of experiencing, understanding and judging. Clearly, Carruthers claims too much for human judgement, here, and his criticism of Hick's epistemology, grounded in Kantian insights, is unfounded.

Justification for the Kantian Epistemological Model

The question of whether it is possible to know that there is a correspondence between phenomena and things in themselves, and that the latter act upon consciousness, has also been raised, [although not specifically in relation to Hick's epistemology of religion.] 52. Nevertheless, I believe human experience can be utilized in support of Hick's pluralist hypothesis, based on a Kantian epistemological model. Human experience does suggest that our perceptions of entities, while inextricably linked with what those entities are, "an sich," are in fact partial and incomplete perceptions. If I see a snowflake falling, I do not perceive it "as it is in itself " with the precision and exactitude that inspection under a microscope would reveal. But the existence of the snowflake is unquestioned, as is also the relationship between "what it is in itself" and my perception of it. Likewise, the moon is very far from being a silver ball in the sky, which it appears to be to human perception. Yet the correspondence between the phenomenal entity and the "real" moon as it is in itself has been demonstrated, the former is a partial and incomplete image of the latter. Thus, Hick is justified in stating that, in applying Kant's theme to the epistemology of religion, "*...we are employing a well consolidated development in contemporary understanding.*" 43. Hick's theology of religions, in laying emphasis upon the interpretative element in all human experience, including religious belief, is in agreement with an important contributor to the sociology of knowledge. Both Kant and Hick recognize the importance of the part played by human experience, in our perceptions of reality.

Conclusion

It has been my purpose, in this chapter, to demonstrate the internal coherence of Hick's theology of religious pluralism, and to underline the fact that his espousal of pluralism, since 1973, is consistent with his general theology of the nature of religious belief based on the religious experience and moral awareness of humanity. I have also attempted to justify his use of Kantian epistemology in grounding his theology of religious pluralism, and to reply to a range of criticisms that have been levelled against it. Several questions remain unanswered, notably, the question of the existence of genuinely conflicting truth claims, and, also, the question of Hick's stance regarding the cognitive status of such claims in relation to recent developments in his theology regarding eschatological verification. The charge that, here, he lays himself open to contradiction will be examined more closely in Part 2. It would be impossible, however, to examine the nature of Hick's religious pluralism in its completeness, without an investigation of the implications of the Copernican Revolution for significant Christian doctrines, notably that of the Incarnation. Chapter 4, therefore, is concerned with Hick's revision of incarnational Christology, and the well-known "myth debate."

CHAPTER 3 NOTES.

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37. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.140.
38. *ibid.* p.140.
39. *ibid.* p.242.
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48. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp. 247-248.
49. D.Hume. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. para.95. Hume makes a similar point regarding the nature of mysticism in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. ed. N.Pike. Indiana. Bobbs-Meril. 1970. "Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance? Or how do MYSTICS, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the deity, differ from sceptics or atheists?" [Pt.4, para 1.]
50. G.H.Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. An Elaboration and Evaluation of the Position of John Hick. Boston. University Press of America. 1990. p.299.
51. *ibid.* p.301.
52. A.Wedburg. A History of Philosophy. vol.2. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1984. p.174.
53. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.240.

CHAPTER 4

The Christological Debate: Hick's Historical, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives

Throughout most of Christian history, the essence of the faith has been encapsulated in the text, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." [John, 1. v.14.] For Christian believers the doctrine that Christ was uniquely divine, the Incarnate Son of God, is the basis of the belief that Christianity alone among religions was founded by God. It is because of the doctrine of the Incarnation that Christianity has claimed finality vis a vis other world faiths. This remains the stance of exclusivist Christian theologians such as Karl Barth and Lesslie Newbigin, who hold that Christ offers the only valid path to salvation, while inclusivists such as Karl Rahner would claim that the salvation mediated through other religions is nevertheless the same salvation that is definitively and historically revealed in Christ.

In formulating his Copernican Revolution, Hick clearly perceived the problems that arise in relation to Christianity's self-understanding, and an espousal of religious pluralism. *"...Wherever the Holy is revealed it claims an absolute response of faith and worship which seems incompatible with a like response to any other claimed disclosure of the Holy."* 1.

Clearly, the Copernican Revolution has implications for certain Christian doctrines, notably that of the Incarnation. Hick's response, which he believes allows Christians to respond to Christ as saviour, without demanding that he be definitive or normative for others, is to reinterpret the doctrine of Incarnation as mythic truth, rather than literal truth. This notion of mythic truth, as distinct from literal truth, has been the subject of considerable controversy; it will therefore be necessary for us to examine the use of the concept of myth in theology in some detail.

The Use of Myth in Theology

The very notion of attaching the idea of "myth" to the Incarnation seems to have been responsible, at least in part, for the controversy which followed the publication of The Myth of God Incarnate,

edited by Hick, in 1977. In fact, Hick's criticisms of the doctrine on historical, philosophical and theological grounds, and his consequent reinterpretation of it, had been thoroughly outlined in God and the Universe of Faiths, published four years previously. At the time of this publication there was little controversial response, which seems to indicate that it is indeed the very notion of myth, with its [incorrect] connotations of "untruth", which has been responsible for emotive response. It will be necessary shortly, to examine Hick's reinterpretation in detail, noting from the outset that he is far from being alone in believing that the traditional Chalcedonian formulation of the doctrine is no longer acceptable. 2. It is essential first of all, however, to clarify what Hick means when he speaks of "mythic truth," for, as stated, much criticism has centred on the very use of the term "mythological."

The use of the notion of myth in theology is relatively non-controversial in relation to certain Christian doctrines such as the Creation and the Fall, where there is little evidence to corroborate a literal understanding of the stories portrayed and much that suggests that they are not literally true. However, it has been argued that the Incarnation must be excluded from the category of myth, because of the fundamental historicity of the life of Jesus.

"...The stories of the Incarnation and atonement are tied up with a specific historical event; they have their grounding in something that actually happened in the course of human history; on the one hand they are not outside history, and on the other they are not true of all history." 3.

Here, Norman Pittenger is making the point that the Incarnation, relating as it does to a particular historical person, is contrary to the nature of myth, which expresses [usually through fictitious characters] what is universally true for humans in relation to God, and is valid for every age. Hick believes certain kinds of myth, such as the story of the Fall, function in this way as kinds of moral exhortation, and are valuable in that most peoples' minds are more powerfully affected by a picturesque, parabolic expression of an idea, than by an abstract expression. 4. Pittenger's objection to the inclusion of the Incarnation in the category of myth on the grounds of the

historicity of the events, has, however, been emphasized by several other theologians, including Wolfhart Pannenberg 5. More recently, this has been criticized by R.C.Crawford, who believes it is inappropriate to use a term which in everyday speech means "non-existence." 6.

However, it is by no means clear that the use of the terminology of myth necessarily undermines the historicity of an event, in fact, the reverse may be true. It is quite possible for theologians to accept the category of myth and to use it in such a way that it acts, rather, as a bulwark against historical criticism. For example, Emil Brunner writes of the Christian "myth" as belonging to a different category of myth from pagan mythology, but accepts the terminology as incorporating the entirety of Christian teaching relating to the Creation, Fall, Incarnation and Atonement, in a dimension of "super-history. "... *He writes of "the crossing of that frontier that separates all history from God, that event which takes place between time and eternity."* 7. Here, Brunner seems to be using the terminology of myth to insulate the Incarnation from the challenge of historical criticism while nevertheless preserving it as a historical event. It is clear that very much depends upon the theologian's interpretation of the concept of myth. Hick emphasizes that it is a very imprecise term and must therefore be used consistently by the theologian within a given definition, which need not necessarily assume that all other definitions are wrong. 8. He himself draws a distinction between literal truth and mythological truth and defines literal truth in terms of simple factual assertions, or theories and hypotheses.

"...I am distinguishing it [mythological language] from the language of theory or hypothesis. A theory, whether theological or scientific, starts with some puzzling phenomenon and offers a hypothetical description of a wider situation - wider spatially or temporally or both - such that, seen within this wider context, the phenomenon is no longer puzzling." 9.

A theory, hypothesis or simple factual assertion must in principle or in practice be capable of confirmation or disconfirmation. Clearly, a simple factual assertion such as, "the 37 bus goes to Richmond," is able to be confirmed or disconfirmed by getting on the bus and travelling, [or,

preferably, by asking the driver first!]) The same requirement of confirmation or disconfirmation is in principle true of scientific theories or hypotheses. Obviously, the doctrine of the Incarnation is not a simple factual assertion that can be confirmed or disconfirmed in this way, but neither, Hick believes, is it a theological theory. If the language of theory or hypothesis is applied to the doctrine of the Incarnation a false kind of truth claim is made, and any attempt to "unpack" or confirm the theory is doomed to failure. Hick believes this is corroborated by the attempts of the Early Church to do just this, which resulted in the Early Christian heresies. ¹⁰ This is not to say, however, that all truth content is removed from the Incarnation as expressed within Hick's understanding of myth. Within his definition;

"...a myth is a story which is told which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to something or someone but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers. Thus the truth of a myth is a kind of practical truth consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude which it evokes." ¹¹.

He also states that "true myths" must be clearly related to a context of factual belief.

"...If the entire range of religious beliefs were regarded as non-factual, none of them could possess the kind of significance which depends upon a connection with objective reality...I suggest, then, that what might be called valuable or significant myth is necessarily parasitic upon non-mythological beliefs, and that if a set of myths becomes complete and autonomous it thereby forfeits its cognitive status." ¹².

The appropriate response Hick is thinking of in relation to the myth of the Incarnation is that the hearer is to understand Jesus as so fully God's agent and mediator that following him is an assured path to salvation. ¹³. [Although, as he has clarified to a greater extent in An Interpretation of Religion, he is not the only path to salvation.] ¹⁴. The notion of "appropriate response" has been questioned by G.D'Costa, in that the notion of "an appropriate response" [or an "inappropriate

response"] is vacuous if it relies upon the subjectivity of the believer; it must bear some direct reference to the actual character of the event itself. 15. But it does not seem to me that an element of subjectivity can necessarily be eliminated. If for example, my house is broken into and I describe this, in mythological language, as "the work of the Devil," it would generally be considered "appropriate" for my hearer to respond with agreement, or, at the very least, with sympathy and condemnation of the event itself. But it is of course theoretically possible that my hearer is a secret house-breaker and would respond in terms that I should consider wholly inappropriate! Hick has since conceded that the "natural or standard" response does not occur in every instance.

"...a myth may fail to communicate successfully to a particular person at a particular time. And of course, even if it does communicate, its message may be rejected, the response which it tends to evoke being suppressed and replaced by a contrary response." 16.

However, the failure of a particular myth, such as that of the Incarnation, to communicate, could only be viewed as "inappropriate response" or "sin," if it were the only religious myth with which the believer is presented. But of course, this is not the case. Hick has recently severed his notion of an "appropriate dispositional response" more completely from the specifically Christological sphere, and has placed it in a more radically pluralistic setting.

"...In so far as these gods and absolutes are indeed manifestations of the ultimately Real, an appropriate human response to any of them will also be an appropriate response to the Real. It will not be the only appropriate form of response, because the Real is perceived in a range of ways, but it will nevertheless be an appropriate response." 17.

In so far as Hick continues to assert the factual character of Christianity's central affirmations, I believe it is possible for him, without contradiction, to speak of the true religious myth of the Incarnation. In his chapter entitled "Religion as Fact-Asserting", in God and the Universe of Faiths

he makes it clear that what he calls "valuable or significant myths" are reliant upon facts which have cognitive value. 18. He distinguishes between these, and "myths which live in a system which is mythological throughout." He makes it clear that the myth of the Incarnation belongs to the former category, it is a referent to a factual statement about who and what Jesus was. It is not true, therefore, to suggest that all factual and ontological import is removed, from claims made about Christ, by the use of the term "mythological" according to Hick's own understanding of it. 19. Nor is it permissible, as J.A.T. Robinson points out, to equate "myth" with "untruth," 20. Within Hick's understanding, myth refers to a very profound level of truth, which must, nevertheless, be distinguished from "literal truth," if this means, in terms of the Incarnation, that God is disclosed "in person" in Jesus, in a way that is different in kind from every other way that he may be disclosed. Hick believes that God is revealed in Christ [precisely how, we shall examine further presently] but not in a unique, unprecedented and unrepeatable way that is implied by the notion of "literal truth," within a the context of traditional doctrinal structure.

Hick has been criticized for making this distinction between mythological and literal language by Lash, who believes it is too rigid, and does not do justice to the subtleties of religious language. 21. This is strange, for Hick himself concedes this: *"...the question is probably too sharply posed, for the early cultures did not draw our modern distinction."* 22. But what he is saying is that, since modern philosophical thought does make such a distinction [whether we like it or not] it is necessary to question whether the thought forms of the ancient world can remain appropriate or meaningful for the modern mind. As we saw in Chapter 2, many theologians have some sympathy with this view, including Rahner, who adheres to the Chalcedonian formulations while recognizing the difficulties inherent in the "formal structures" of religious doctrines, for modern thinkers. 23. Clearly, since the critics of "The Myth" object so strongly to the idea of the Incarnation being an expression of mythological truth through mythological language, they are themselves acknowledging that a distinction exists, between forms of language. Critics have yet to explain why it is that a "true religious myth," that evokes right responses to God, or Ultimate Reality, is necessarily an inferior kind of truth to a "literal truth." Put in another way, the onus seems to be

on the Incarnationalists to explain what is meant when it is claimed that Jesus is God in one of his modes of being, and how this is literally true, in order to make it clear why the idea of mythological truth is unacceptable. As we shall see presently, considerable philosophical difficulties are involved in making the claim that this is, literally, religious truth.

Myth and Metaphor

Recently, and probably in an attempt to make more acceptable his notion of mythic truth, Hick has shifted the emphasis of his terminology in explication of the doctrine of incarnation, by invoking the concept of metaphor. Nevertheless, his thesis still rests on the claim that metaphorical use of language is to be distinguished from literal use.

"...The metaphorical stands in contrast to the literal use of language...the precise way in which it differs has proved hard to locate, and has in fact never been defined in any generally acceptable way. But the central idea is indicated by the derivation of the Greek "metaphorein," to transfer. There is a transfer of meaning...Metaphorical meaning is thus generated by the interaction of two sets of ideas." 24.

Clearly, the two sets of ideas Hick has in mind in relation to the Christian doctrine of incarnation, are those of a human life lived so openly and responsively to the Divine presence that, [metaphorically] the human life is to be understood as an incarnation of that same presence. In this sense, Hick's Christology may be said to remain "incarnational", although it clearly falls short of the ecclesiastically orthodox understanding determined by the Early Church. 25. In reality, Hick's recent shift from the terminology of myth to that of metaphor makes very little difference to his explication of the Incarnation, for he believes religious myths derive from the incorporation and development of metaphor within the life of a given tradition. He writes;

" ...metaphor can readily develop into myth in the sense of a powerful complex of ideas, usually in story form, which is not literally true but which may nevertheless be true in the practical

sense that it tends to evoke an appropriate dispositional response to the subject matter. A myth, so defined, is a much extended metaphor." 26.

Hick's thinking as regards the nature of the incarnation has remained consistent in recent years, but he is obviously trying to explicate his notions of myth/metaphor in such a way as to respond to those critics who conceive his notion of mythic truth as "untruth", and to preserve a strong christological emphasis which nevertheless sees Christianity as one of a plurality of responses to the Divine.

Hick's thesis could, however, come under criticism from those who would argue that this analysis of the nature of metaphor in religious language falls short of its true significance and function. J.M.Soskice, in Metaphor and Religious Language produces an interesting typology of theories of metaphor. She makes a distinction between substitutive, emotive and incremental theories;

"...those that see metaphor as a decorative way of saying what could be said literally; those that see metaphor as original not in what it says, but in the affective impact it has, and those that see metaphor as a unique cognitive vehicle enabling one to say things that can be said in no other way." 27.

In terms of this typology, Hick's understanding of the nature of metaphor clearly falls within the spheres of substitution and emotivism. However, Soskice criticises the substitutive and emotive accounts on the grounds that, in the case of both, no real cognitive or assertive gain is made through the use of metaphor. She draws a parallel between emotive theories of metaphor, and emotive [or non-cognitive] theories of language. *"...It has been difficult to formulate a convincing theory of "emotive meaning" bereft of cognitive content... we cannot conceive of emotive "import" apart from a cognitive content which elicits it." 28.*

If Soskice is correct in her understanding of the relationship between religious language and the usage of metaphor in religion, this must imply some tension between Hick's christology and his epistemology of religion, given his defence of the cognitive status of religious language. I will

argue, however, that the typology formulated by Soskice draws too sharp a distinction between different theories of metaphor, and seeks, artificially, to extrapolate different meaning from metaphor, as distinct from Hick's more subtle notion of transference of meaning.

Soskice herself favours a version of the incremental theory, by which metaphor is viewed as both fully cognitive and capable of saying that which can be said in no other way. 29. She cites I.A. Richard's idea of the "interanimation of words" by which words within an utterance are not viewed as "being used metaphorically" or "containing metaphorical meanings" but, rather, the utterance is to be understood as a whole and unique entity, construed from within a specific context of meaning. She refers to Auden's phrase:

"The unmentionable odour of death

Offends the September night,"

as an example of the use of metaphor incrementally. 30. Here Auden is saying something about the foreboding of war which is appropriate to the notion of odour, without actually speaking about smell at all. In this way there is, according to Soskice,

"...a unity of subject matter and a plurality of association networks, and this is what we intended to mark by defining metaphor as speaking about one thing or state of affairs in terms which are suggestive of another." 31.

What is surely questionable, however, is how far this definition of incremental metaphor actually differs from Hick's idea of a transfer of meaning generated by the interaction of two sets of ideas. Nor is it clear how Soskice can claim that unique cognitive content is encapsulated in this metaphorical usage, for in the example she cites, it is clearly the case that Auden is saying something about the foreboding of war that could be said in literal language, ie. he could say something like, "there was a sense, at that time, that war, death and destruction were about to come upon us." This is not to deny that metaphorical language is without powerful force and impact; one would, equally, recognise that Salvador Dali's painting "Mountain Lake" which is also suggestive of the foreboding of war, is powerfully evocative in its impact. But the impact, I would suggest, is nevertheless primarily emotive, and it could well be argued that, were the metaphor

to change meaning, rather than enhance meaning, we might well consider it to be used inappropriately.

Soskice's work has been cited by Gerald Loughlin in "Squares and Circles" (ed H.Hewitt). Problems in the Philosophy of Religions. Clearly, he would favour the incremental approach to the theory of metaphor, for it is his view that "...*Hick's historico-critical and non-metaphorical account of Jesus simply does not have the same cognitive content as more traditional accounts.*"

32. But Loughlin fails to explain in what way he believes cognitive content, as distinct from emotive content, is lessened by Hick's account. It is probable that Soskice's typology draws too great a distinction between different theories of metaphor, that in fact there is an overlap between categories, and that metaphor may function to enhance affective impact, while at the same time retaining cognitive content. As I have suggested, a metaphor which functions to change meaning rather than to enhance meaning, might well be regarded as a metaphor used inappropriately, and does not in fact function as metaphor. Metaphor, I would argue, is firmly linked to the concept which is its referent; its function is to enhance, through imagery, our understanding of a particular concept, but if it functions otherwise, to change meaning, then it ceases to be metaphor and becomes instead, conceptual language. Soskice seems to blur the distinction between conceptual language and metaphorical language through the notion of metaphor conveying unique cognitive content. If it does so, what I would suggest is that in reality a new concept is introduced.

Soskice's work is, however, very much in alignment with what Chester Gillis has called the "irreducibility thesis" in relation to myth and metaphor. According to Gillis in, A Question of Final Belief, there is a considerable body of support for the view that,

"... a metaphor cannot be transformed, translated or reduced to a simile or to any literal statement without remainder. For there is a loss of cognitive content when an interaction metaphor is literally paraphrased" 33.

Gillis has a profound appreciation of the genres of myth and metaphor in the context of language and meaning; he believes that Twentieth Century scholars have discerned that,

"myths are set in a time which is altogether different from the normal human experience of time. They do not occur "Once upon a time" (as fairy tales begin) but "In the beginning", which is a time before time itself. They explore origins and claim truths. Thus they are not lies or falsehoods, but bearers of profound truths". 34.

Gillis himself presents a systematic historical overview of the theories of myth and metaphor as they have developed in the Twentieth Century, drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, Langdon Gilkey, I.A.Richards and Max Black. 35. Nevertheless, his irreducibility thesis' remains problematic if, as I have argued in relation to Soskice's work, the notion of the "unique cognitive content" of metaphor entails that the new and possibly inappropriate concepts are introduced, as distinct from the clear links which remain between a factual statement and its mythological presentation, when metaphor and myth are said to represent a transference of meaning. Gillis acknowledges (in a footnote) that there is no consensus of scholarly opinion as regards the status of metaphor. 36. However, he does not really explore the views of those opposed to an "irreducibility thesis" or engage in debate with them. This considerably weakens his own stance.

Gillis' criticisms of Hick's view of myth rest upon the fact that, according to him, they fail to explore the subtleties of language. *"...Since his position on language is critical to his work, I hold that his project is flawed by his un-nuanced understanding of myth and metaphor. 37.* Gillis is dissatisfied with the distinction Hick makes between literal truth and metaphorical truth.

"... Hick views incarnational language as mythical, or non-literal, language. Or, in another place, he says it has "metaphorical rather than literal truth". This "metaphorical truth", it seems, is not founded in reality as is "literal truth" in Hick's conception. There is therefore a sharp distinction between the two types of

truth, with the literal clearly being the basis upon which the mythical (or any other) truth is built". 38.

Here Gillis seems to echo the earlier comment of Lash, which, as I have stated, pays too little regard to Hick's acknowledgement in The Myth of God Incarnate that, "...*the question is too sharply posed for the early cultures did not draw our modern distinction*". 39. Nor do I understand Gillis' claim that Hick's notion of mythological truth is "not founded in reality". Hick, as Gillis acknowledges, clearly states that religious myths are parasitic upon factual truth claims. 40. Therefore there must be a sense in which they are founded in, or originate, in reality. Thus the myth of the Son Incarnate is founded in the reality of historical person, Jesus, and without Jesus such a religious myth would not have developed. This Hick has acknowledged on many occasions; there is certainly a sense in which religious myths are dependent on factual truth claims. However, Hick holds that the dependency on factual truth claims need not entail that those truth claims are claims for exclusive truth. Here, Gillis is in agreement. 41. But if this is so, it is very far from clear in what sense his theology of religions differs from Hick's, for he does not expand his thesis in this respect.

Since this, Hick has replied to Gillis' criticisms of his understanding of the nature of myth in ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. He is in agreement that what Gillis has called the non-cognitive account entails that, within this understanding, myth "...*does not make literally true propositional assertions*". 42. However, he goes on to ask "...*is not a purely propositional conception of truth excessively narrow and too much a function of Western rationalist modes of thought?*" 43. Again, Hick demonstrates his appreciation of the subtleties of language and truth conceptions, against criticism that his distinction between literal and mythic is rigid and un-nuanced. Hick's awareness of such subtleties has been demonstrated on numerous occasions, refuting the criticisms of Lash and Gillis.

Criticisms of Hick's notion of "Mythic Truth" in relation to Christology

In recent times, the failure of some critics to do justice to Hick's notion of mythic truth has led to a misreading of his christology. This is exemplified in the work of G.H. Carruthers, who writes of Hick's christology;

"...Hick assumes from the outset that Jesus did not represent something radically new in God's self-revelation. What Hick says about the prophets, their consciousness of God and God's presence to them, is what he says about God's presence to Him. There is nothing else to be said about Jesus. Hence, the title "Son of God" when applied to Jesus can only mean what it meant in the Old Testament." 44.

This, I believe, seriously diminishes what Hick has said about the significance of Jesus. Despite the fact that he believes the idea of Incarnation should not be interpreted literally, his stance is that;

"...it is a way of saying that Jesus is our living contact with the Transcendent God. In his presence we find that we are brought into the presence of God. We believe that he is so truly God's servant that in living as his disciples we are living according to the divine purpose. And as our sufficient and saving point of contact with God there is for us something absolute about him which justifies the absolute language which Christianity has developed. Thus reality is being expressed mythologically when we say that Jesus is the Son of God, God incarnate, the Logos made flesh." 45.

Carruthers, however, seems to find the notion of "reality being expressed mythologically" unacceptable; he fails to do justice to Hick's christology because he treats the notion of myth as "untruth," drawing too sharp a distinction between literal and non-literal meaning and equating the

former with truth and the latter with falsehood in a way that ultimately caricatures Hick's christology. His misrepresentation of what Hick is saying about mythological truth is exemplified in the context of his criticism of Hick's alleged desire to ground Christology exclusively in the consciousness of Christ. He writes;

"...it is true that Christology must be grounded - at least in part - in Jesus' historical consciousness. Christology cannot make Jesus out to be something or someone he was not. Otherwise, Christology would be fraudulent, mythological, proposing a lie or at least an unintentional error concerning the truth about Jesus."

46.

The juxtaposition of the adjectives, "fraudulent" and "mythological" seems to imply that Carruthers holds that anything that is not literally true is, by definition, untrue. This becomes clear when his own view of the developmental process from New Testament christology to the Incarnational doctrine of Nicea is analyzed. He draws upon Longeran's notion of differentiation of consciousness, and applies this notion, as does Longeran, to the development of Christology in the first few centuries A.D.

"...My point is that while there has indeed been a shift in the realm of meaning, it is a shift from common sense to theory, occasioned by a differentiation in consciousness. Hick maintains the shift is from non-literal to literal meaning, and therefore invalid. I maintain the shift is from common sense literal meaning to theoretical literal meaning." 47.

Carruthers endorses Longeran's explication of differentiated consciousness, as applied to the development of Incarnational Christology from its New Testament roots, because within this schema, there is no shift in the kind of truth affirmed, whereas Hick's account of developmental Christology affirms that there has been a transposition from non-literal, metaphorical meaning, discernible in Scripture, to literal, metaphysical meaning, as encapsulated in the doctrinal structure of Incarnational belief. Hick himself calls for a return to a metaphorical or mythological

interpretation of the significance of Christ and removes the concept of literalness; this, ultimately, is what Carruthers cannot accept. For him, "literalness" is the sticking point of religious truth, for the uniqueness of Christ is dependent on the fact that he was "literally" God. What Carruthers does not succeed in doing, however, is demonstrating that all truth is removed from Hick's christology; it is impossible for him to do this while he maintains so rigid a notion of truth which does not allow that there may be different kinds of truth. The assumption that all truth must be literal truth is, I believe, a mistaken one, but Carruthers cannot avoid making this mistake because he distances himself from the notion of mythological truth, and rejects Hick's nuanced view of religious truth, which distinguishes between a true religious myth and a religious theory or hypothesis. Carruthers rejects both these ideas;

"...The point is, of course, that the Church doctrines and definitions are not hypotheses about data. They are affirmations of what is true...in Church doctrines, the truth has already been revealed by God, and affirmed by faith." 48.

Rejecting the idea of religious theories or hypotheses, Carruthers has only one answer to the fundamental question, "how do we know what is religious truth?" - that is, Revelation. He further clarifies this;

"...the Christian faith rests on a revelation that took place in and through the historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This full Christ-event already contained the truth of its meaning, a meaning that would be affirmed in faith and developed in theology. It is for this reason that the language of Jesus' Incarnation is not mythological, and that it does affirm the objective truth about the uniqueness of Jesus as the world's Saviour." 49.

There are two problems, however, in invoking the idea of Revelation as the ultimate determinant of religious truth. Firstly, it tends to lead to an intellectual cul-de-sac in enquiry, for faiths other than Christianity hold equally strong notions of Revelation based on their scriptures or authority

figures, which are at variance with Christian notions. Hick's notion of different kinds of truth avoids this impasse. Secondly, as we saw in Chapter 1, when the concept of Revelation is examined from a philosophical perspective, we find that it cannot be classed as a separate category of authentic human knowledge distinct from experience, but is itself part of experience, interpreted by reason. For Hick, whose epistemology of religion is partially based on a recognition of the veridical character of religious experience, it would be inconsistent to treat some religious experience as authentic knowledge of God, while arbitrarily dismissing other experience as unauthentic. 50. Because this thinking is grounded in Hick's philosophy of religion, Carruthers is probably right in stating that;

"...his theological reflections are shaped by conclusions he reached in his philosophy of religion...when there is a conflict between his philosophy and traditional Christian theology, it is the latter that will have to be reexamined." 51.

I am not sure what Carruthers is implying here; if he is suggesting theology can simply dismiss philosophical insights, I would point out that the major world faiths have in fact invariably utilized the resources of philosophy to underpin and substantiate their world-views and visions of reality. Without implying that philosophy necessarily possesses the vantage point from which to reach an adequate theory of religion, I would suggest that any theologian who holds that there is a clear demarcation between what can be discovered about God through human reason, and what can be discovered solely through God's Revelation in Christianity, and asserts primacy to the latter, is likely to produce a less adequate theory of religion than that of Hick, whose epistemology of religion, as we saw in Chapter 1, is based on a synthesis of rationalist and empiricist philosophy. If, when we speak of Revelation, we are in fact speaking of the experiences and reflections of men and women that have been made possible by God through the religious traditions, we have good reason to be dissatisfied with a notion of Revelation that is limited to or made absolute within one particular tradition. This is because belief in the absolute status of the revealed truths of one tradition, which frequently involves ignoring or undermining the revealed truths of another,

ultimately undermines the validity of the whole spectrum of religious experience which is the "raw material" of Revelation in the first place.

The Range of Hick's criticisms of the Doctrine of the Incarnation

It seems probable, from Hick's account in God and the Universe of Faiths, that his rejection of traditional incarnational Christology was prompted, above all else, by the theological issue, i.e. the implications of the doctrine in grounding Christianity's claim for finality vis a vis other world faiths. However, Hick believes there are other problems associated with the interpretation of the doctrine which give rise to philosophical and historical objections and these can be formulated in terms of certain questions. How is the notion that Jesus was uniquely divine to be reconciled with an equal emphasis on his humanity? To what extent does the content of Scripture actually reveal that Jesus was uniquely divine? It is clear that criticisms of the doctrine can be categorized in terms of philosophical, historical and theological objections, though these categories overlap and are intrinsically interlinked, making what is for Hick a cumulative case against the doctrine of Incarnation in its traditional formulation. For the purpose of examining his revision of traditional Christology, it will be expedient to examine each category separately, however, starting with the historical approach. It will not be possible to examine the entire range of opinion as regards Christology, for here the literature is vast. In view of the focus of this thesis, the discussion will be limited to the views of Hick, and those of his immediate opponents and supporters.

Historical grounds for criticising the doctrine of Incarnation

In 1977 Hick wrote of the difficulties which we encounter when we try to speak of Jesus as a historical individual who lived in Palestine almost 2000 years ago. *"...For New Testament scholarship has shown how fragmentary and ambiguous are the data available to us as we try to look back across nineteen and a half centuries"* 52.

More recently he has pointed out, in reply to Gerald Loughlin's criticisms of the historical / critical method, that historically, it has been believed for a period of seventeen centuries that Jesus himself claimed to be God Incarnate and that,

"...there has thus been a major shift from believing that Jesus was God because he said so, to believing it because the New Testament is sometimes close to saying so, to believing it because the church came to say so". 53.

It is the belief of Norman Anderson, however, that Hick *"...greatly exaggerates the paucity of positive evidence we have about the one to whom he refers as the largely unknown man of Nazareth"*. 54. Hick has recently disclaimed any pretence to be a biblical scholar, but, drawing on the work of New Testament exegesis, his stance as regards what the historical Jesus claimed for himself remain substantially unaltered.

"...I think it is safe to say that there is a general consensus in the New Testament studies today, Catholic as well as Protestant, conservative as well as liberal, that the historical Jesus, did not teach that he was God, or God the Son, the second person of a Holy Trinity, incarnate. Indeed, he would probably have regarded such an idea as blasphemous". 55.

Further,

"...New Testament scholarship has shown that the historical Jesus did not claim to be God incarnate and that what we know as the doctrines of the Incarnation, Trinity and Atonement have escalated into theoretical constructions going far beyond the original experience to which they are related". 56.

However, in the light of Norman Anderson's criticism, and in view of Hick's own disclaimer to be an "expert" in New Testament studies, it might be profitable to consider, briefly, the quantity and quality of the historical evidence for Jesus, and the range of views of New Testament scholars, before examining Hick's own Christological affirmations, in more detail.

Of course, any judgement about whether we have very little or a reasonably great amount of evidence about the historical Jesus must, necessarily, be a value judgement; it would, however,

be difficult to make a case for there being a great amount of evidence. Moreover, such evidence as we do have - the New Testament - is not what modern historical research would consider particularly objective evidence, as J.D.G.Dunn has pointed out. 57. This is hardly the fault of the Gospels or other New Testament writings, which were not intended to be straightforward historical records, but confessions of faith. Nevertheless, the lack of objective evidence, such as might have been provided by, for example, a Roman Centurion's eyewitness account of the death and resurrection of Jesus, must hamper any quest for a "historical Jesus." 58. It must be recognized, also, that there are certain limitations in a historical approach to the question of whether Jesus was uniquely divine, "vere homo and vere Deus." Historical exegesis could never of itself prove the necessity or otherwise of the Incarnation as an appropriate interpretation of the life of Jesus Christ. However, it could provide some substructure of evidence which may point towards the Incarnation as the only reasonable and complete interpretation of Jesus' life and work. There ought to be a substantial substructure of evidence to underpin the doctrine, to help eliminate the fear that a historical religion is "floating free" from its historical sources. The problem, however, is that there is very far from being anything like a consensus of agreement among New Testament scholars regarding what exactly the New Testament sources do point to. As Paul Knitter has graphically stated;

"...to expect to find a unified response among New Testament scholars on the question of Jesus' uniqueness would be about as naive as to look for a consensus on economic theory among Washington politicians. If we attempt even a general survey of contemporary works on New Testament christology we find ourselves in a thicket of divergent opinions and academic disputes." 59.

The Range of Theological Opinion regarding the Historical Evidence

A brief survey of opinion may serve to illustrate this. M.Wiles, believes that, *"...any absoluteness implicit in the concept of an incarnate divine being is necessarily dissipated by the tentativeness*

of our knowledge of his life and words." 60. It is undeniable that there is a certain tension created in attributing absolute divinity to a certain historical person, while acknowledging that our knowledge of him is fragmentary, incomplete and to a certain extent contradictory. For, if any general statement can be made about the Gospel writings, it is that a variety of christologies are revealed, and therefore the Incarnation in its traditional formulation could only be one interpretation, among several, of the events of Scripture.

However, it can be argued that the historical enquiry ought not to be restricted to the witness of the Gospel writers. New Testament witness leaves us in no doubt about the transforming effect of Christ's life upon some people in the First Century world, therefore the historical enquiry should be broadened to incorporate evidence associated with this impact upon the receivers of God's revelation, and to include the Church's understanding of this throughout the historical ages. This argument is strengthened by the fact that it is very difficult to extract a purely "historical Jesus" from the Church's understanding of him. 61. The totality of historical evidence must include the Church's witness. Given a broader historical context, however, opinion is still divided. New Testament scholars such as C.F.D.Moule believe that there is such a radical discontinuity between the strictly monotheistic presuppositions of the First Century Jewish world and the Christian beliefs which rapidly developed that they are only explicable in terms of the fact that Jesus was the Son Incarnate. 62. It is equally possible to argue, however, [using Newbigin's terminology,] that the "plausibility structure" of First Century Palestine predisposed the early Christians towards the apocalyptic expectation of some unique act of God on behalf of his people, and that the development of incarnational Christology becomes explicable against this background, especially given the fact that not only Jewish, but Hellenistic influences were prevalent in the context of the times. This would be the stance of critics such as M.Wiles. 63. Klaus Runia concedes that, *"...it is evident to everyone who knows the New Testament that it nowhere offers a full-scale Christology a la Nicaea or Chalcedon."* 64. However, he comes very near to contradicting himself, since he also states, *"...it is a matter of fact that throughout the whole New Testament we find indications of a high Christology."* 65. Indications of such a Christology are not, however, the Christology

itself, absolute and unequivocal, free from human interpretation. Knowledge gained by means of New Testament revelation is mediated through human experience, as is all knowledge other than that which falls into the sphere of definitions and tautologous propositions. Frances Young makes this point when she says, *"...the traditional formulations, so far from enshrining revealed truth, are themselves the product of witness and confession in a particular historical environment."* 66. Brian Hebblethwaite, a theologian of a different persuasion in that he upholds a "high" Incarnational Christology, nevertheless makes a similar point when he writes;

"...after all, our only access to who God is and to what God has done is through human witness, human interpretation understanding and expression...Even our own experience of God is apprehended in the light of an inherited developing tradition and is subject, of course, to the limitations of our own powers of understanding and expression." 67.

What our brief survey of the range of theological opinion seems to suggest is that the doctrine of Incarnation is not something that is directly presented in Scripture, but is developed from, and subject to, the anthropological conditioning that is integral to all human thought and theological development.

Hick's Christological Affirmations

Turning to Hick's own interpretation of the New Testament, it is certainly the case that he retains strong Christological emphases in his interpretation of Scripture. The "largely unknown man of Nazareth" is nevertheless a man in whom the love of God is manifest to an extraordinary degree.

"...I see the Nazarene, then, as intensely and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God. He was a man of God, living in the unseen presence of God, and addressing God as "abba," father...Thus in Jesus' presence we should have felt that we are in the presence of God - not in the sense that the man Jesus literally is God, but in the sense that he was so totally conscious

of God that we could catch something of that consciousness by spiritual contagion." 68.

It has been argued that, in fact, Hick's theology retains such strong Christological emphases as to render the Copernican Revolution unnecessary, for he still retains an implicit normative ontological link between God and Jesus. 69. But clearly, Hick does not believe that what he is saying necessitates that Jesus need be literally, or ontologically or uniquely the Son of God as the Church professes him to be, though he must be, and is, normative for Christians through their anthropologically conditioned Christian experience. As he pointed out, several years before his Copernican Revolution, in relation to the text, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me" [John 14. v.6.] - the understanding of God as "Abba," Father, is the distinctively Christian contribution to the understanding of God. It is, however, by no means the only way of understanding God.

"...No man cometh to the Father - that is, to God as Father - except through the Christ in whom as Son the love of the Father is fully revealed. But millions of men and women may in Buddhism have come to God as release out of suffering into Nirvana; or in Islam to God as holy and sovereign will addressing the Arab peoples through Mohammed; or in Hinduism to God as many-sided source and meaning of life." 70.

As J.A.T. Robinson has pointed out, such texts as John 14.16., and others, are misused when they are taken out of context and used in support of Christian exclusivism, or as starting points for evaluating other religions. 71. Hick sees Christ as an eschatological saviour-figure - one among other possible eschatological figures - and believes it is possible to affirm this while denying his ontological status as "God the Son," which he believes is philosophically problematic and insufficiently revealed in Scripture as to be beyond dispute. It is true, as Klaus Runia states, that functional and ontological status is intrinsically linked. 72. A person acts as he does and is able to achieve what he does because of the person that he is. Yet it would be possible to assert that the action of God, the "agape," or perfect love, was present in other great religious leaders such

as Martin Luther King, or Gandhi, without asserting that they were in any ontological sense incarnate of God. The difference is one of degree, rather than kind, as we shall see more clearly in the next section which examines Hick's philosophical objections to the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is because no absolutely necessary or unique ontological status is established for Christ, in Scripture, that I find it impossible to agree with Hebblethwaite when he writes, *"...to say that the acts of Jesus were the acts of God is to assert the homo-ousin."* 73. One could justifiably assert that the acts of Gandhi were the acts of God - and would not thereby dream of asserting the homo-ousin. In making this assertion, Hebblethwaite seems to be making an enormous leap from what derives from Scripture, to the developed doctrinal structures of the Church in the first few centuries A.D. without sufficient regard for the developmental process which undeniably took place.

The Development of Christology in the Early Church

It was at the Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D. that the early Church Fathers adopted the concept of "homo-ousis," of one substance, in their efforts to find language which would do justice to their understanding of the significance of Christ, and this, it must be emphasized, only after bitter dispute.

"...The development of doctrine in the early church was both culturally conditioned and determined by the course of controversy and debate, not to mention factors such as politics, personalities and the chances of history." 74.

Frances Young is referring here to the dispute between Arius and Athanasius, regarding the nature of Christ [and so nearly won by Arius!] In fact, on the admission of the Fathers, the notion "of one substance" does not explain anything; we have no knowledge "a priori" or through experience, of the substance of God, if we mean by substance, "that from which something is made." However, the idea does imply "of one content," which provided a way of saying that the divinity of Christ is a unity of content between the Divine Persons, Father, Son and, by Athanasius'

inclusion, Holy Spirit. Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity developed, in terms of an incarnational understanding of the nature of Christ.

In recent times, however, there has been some recognition that what was said, in Greek, about Christ in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. is relatively meaningless today. The more radical suggestion, made by Hans Küng, is that the categories of "hypostasis" "homo-ousis" etc. would have been equally alien to, and rejected by, the first disciples of Christ, who were Jews. According to Küng, a radical division in the Early Church may be discerned as early as 132 A.D. after the destruction of Jerusalem, which isolated the Jewish Christians in the East from their Greek contemporaries. Küng, citing the work of Adolf Schlatter and Adolf von Harnack, suggests that Jewish Christianity may have been influential in the rise of Islam, for certain, groups, notably the Elkesites, preserved a strictly monotheistic notion of God, and rejected the ecclesiastical developments concerning "hypostasis" and "Son of God." 75. Whether or not the rise of Islam may have been indirectly dependent upon Judeo-Christianity is not our concern, here, fascinating though these suggestions are; what is of importance as regards the historical roots of Christianity is the possibility of discerning a real severance in the understanding of Christ which developed in the first few centuries A.D. from that of his earliest followers. Such a possibility tends to undermine the notion of continuity in the developmental process of christology from its historical basis. [And, incidentally, as pointed out by Knitter, creates a considerable tension where Küng's own christological affirmations are concerned. 76.]

In terms of strict historical evidence, it cannot be shown that the doctrine of the Incarnation is so clearly revealed in Scripture as to be beyond dispute. It is one interpretation, among several, of the events of Scripture. The idea that Incarnation and Trinity are coherent developments from Scripture has been widely explored, however. J.D.G.Dunn, drawing a comparison between the period of Early Church history and the Enlightenment, writes of, "...a natural desire to forge more meaningful and more expressive alternatives out of the available material." 77. G.D'Costa asserts that, "...the a priori assumption that the later interpretations are less valid than the earlier ones is questionable." 78. What cannot be claimed, however, is that we have a set of

interpretations that entirely correlate with each other, therefore a non-incarnational interpretation cannot be ruled out, on the grounds that the historical evidence for Jesus suggests that it is consistent with much of Scripture, and that a variety of Christologies were affirmed in Early Church history. It is possible, however, that a developmental view of Christology may be compatible with a claim for the uniqueness of Christ if, as C.F.D. Moule believes, the more explicit Christological statements are a drawing out and articulating of what is already there, rather than an evolutionary development of divinity out of a primitive adoptionism. 79. Moule also holds that;

"...it is precisely because God is revealed by Christ as a God who became incarnate that he is able to save those who sought him or who seek him in other ways whether before the incarnation or beyond the range of its acknowledgement," 80.

He thereby implicitly aligns himself with an inclusivist position. There seems to me, however, no necessary link between the concept of "all-loving God," and God Incarnate; the former does not necessitate the latter, and were it to do so, this would, arguably, strengthen the case for an all-loving God to have become incarnate in a variety of times and places, rather than in a single historical event. None of these theologians, it must be emphasized, is making the claim that, on the basis of Scriptural evidence, the doctrine of Incarnation is in any sense "Absolute Revelation," free from human interpretation. Neither do they see it as a self-representation of Christ, deriving directly from his own words, but, rather, as a coherent and plausible development of early Christian thought. As regards Jesus' own self-understanding, J.D.G. Dunn believes that he saw himself as;

"...One who was conscious of being God's son, a sense of intimate sonship, an implication that Jesus believed or experienced his sonship to be something distinctive or unique; but the evidence does not allow us to penetrate further or to be more explicit ... there is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth or appearance on

earth. Such self-assertions appear only in the latest form of the canonical Gospel tradition and presuppose substantial developments in christological thinking which cannot be traced back to Jesus himself." 81.

It is notable that Dunn's assessment of Jesus' understanding of his own personhood in fact bears striking resemblance to Hick's own definition of Jesus, quoted above, "I see the Nazarene, then, as intensely and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God ..." Hick would probably accept Dunn's idea of "unique sonship," provided it could be conceded by Christianity that this is mythological truth, and that the father-son concept is simply one way of conceptualizing God, among a variety of ways. Dunn is in agreement with Hick that, on the basis of Jesus' self-testimony, we cannot be more definite or explicit about the Incarnation, than that Jesus experienced a closeness to God which he described in terms of a Father-son relationship. He believes it is inappropriate to describe incarnational language as "mythological," however, for it derives directly from the Jewish concept of divine Wisdom, manifested in a being independent of God himself, in no sense God personified, yet representing God's Revelation and immanence revealed in the Torah. His preference is for viewing this as the language of imagery and metaphor, adapted by early Hellenistic Christianity, rather than the language of myth. However, aside from the controversial issue of language forms and how we should define them, there seems little difference between Dunn's view of Jesus, which emphasizes the sense of sonship he portrayed, and the view expressed by Hick.

Yet the fact remains that Dunn is a convinced Chalcedonian adherent, while Hick is not: this in itself has certain implications. This divergence of opinion seems to suggest that, as far as the historical evidence of the life of Jesus is concerned, much of it is used in a circularity to shore up the presuppositions of an already established theological position. In other words, if one starts the enquiry as an orthodox Incarnationalist, it is perfectly possible to use certain of Jesus' words and actions to support the view that the Incarnation is a plausible and coherent development from Scripture. Conversely, if one starts the enquiry from a non-Incarnational stance, one will conclude

that Chalcedonian christology is by no means implicit in the New Testament evidence. If this is the case, it has undeniable implications as regards the limitations of the historical evidence, as well as underlining the anthropological conditioning of all theological thinking, however well respected and scholarly.

The Problem of Christology and Jesus' Self-consciousness

The question of Jesus' self-consciousness does imply that there are considerable difficulties inherent in a doctrine of Incarnation as it is traditionally understood within a context of Christian Revelation. Certain texts, such as John 4.34. and John 8.28. seem to suggest that Jesus revealed what was made known to him by God. This must logically lead to a subordinationist [or Arianist] christology. Conversely, other texts, such as John 10.30. and John 14.9. seem to suggest that the natures of Jesus and God are mutually identifiable, therefore, God is directly revealed through Christ and the consequent christology is monophysite. Either way, we seem to be led into christological heresy from which the only escape is to detach the christological issue from questions of Jesus' self-consciousness. While it is certainly possible to do this, thereby retaining orthodox christological assertions, the consequence is that the foundation of Christian faith must become, in effect, the recognition of the life of Christ as God's revelation by the members of the believing community. While, as I have stated, it is perfectly possible to defend this view, many Christian believers would find this difficult to accept, in opposition to the view that the life of Christ himself is the revelation. In order to retain a coherent Incarnational Christology, it appears to be necessary to move beyond the consciousness of Jesus, for, as Carruthers concedes, with Dunn, such a Christology can only be partially grounded in the consciousness of Christ, who almost certainly never taught that he was God Incarnate nor consubstantial with the Father. 82. Carruthers asserts the primacy of the Christian faith in grounding the methodology and principles of Christology; it is to the Church's faith and teaching that we must turn to know the truth about the personhood of Christ, for the Church's norm ensures that our interpretation of Christ is the correct interpretation. 83. Citing Anselm's definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" - a definition in itself open to criticism - he elevates the notion of the Church's inerrancy and

reverses what should be the methodological principle of faith, that is the Church seeking understanding in Christ, for the Church can have no function except that which is rooted in the transmission of the message of Jesus, which must be grounded, fundamentally, in the teaching of Christ himself. This is by no means to suggest that all and every development within Christology since New Testament times is invalid; a developmental process within Christology is inevitable, given the time lapse of almost two thousand years. But it is to suggest that Carruthers' presupposition that the Church's faith is the higher norm under which Christology must operate is a dangerous presupposition which elevates the status of the Church beyond its proper function and distorts the relationship between Christ and the Church to an impermissible extent.

The Concept of Divine Wisdom

The question still remains, where should we turn within Scripture, for an understanding of the developmental process which lead to the formulation of the doctrine of Incarnation as traditionally understood? It is of interest to note that it is the idea of pre-existent Wisdom, deriving from Judaic expression and particularly influential upon the Christology of Paul, that is emphasised by Dunn as providing the grounding for the development of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the crucified Jesus is depicted as the Wisdom of God. [1.Cor.1:20 -5.30. Also, 1.Cor.8:6. 2.Cor.4.4. Col.1.15-20.] Dunn believes the later expression of the divinity of Christ is more surely rooted in these passages than in the titles of Christ, for none of them, including "Son of God," would in themselves demonstrate either the divinity or pre-existence of Christ. Dunn emphasizes the significance of the idea of Wisdom in the following way;

"...we can express this [Paul's understanding of Jesus as the full embodiment of Wisdom] as the divinity or even deity of Christ, so long as we understand what that means: the deity is the Wisdom of God, for the Wisdom of God is God reaching out to and active in this world. So the deity of Christ is the deity of Wisdom incarnate; that is, to recognize the deity of Christ is to recognize that in Christ God manifested himself, his power as Creator, his

love as Saviour in a full and final way...Herein we see the origin of the doctrine of the Incarnation." 84.

This passage is cited by Carruthers in support of a traditional and literal understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation, against Hick's mythological reinterpretation. According to Carruthers,

"...it is with this identification, as Dunn points out, that we cross the boundary between humanity and divinity, between inspiration and incarnation." 85.

However, I believe Carruthers reads too much into what Dunn is saying [and into what is said by Paul.] Above, Dunn seems to be suggesting that the activity and Wisdom of Christ was the activity and Wisdom of God, and that an incarnational development of Christology is explicable against this background, but he falls short of identifying Christ with God ontologically. Speaking of Christ as "the image of God," [2.Cor.4.4. Col.1. 15.] and of "God's fullness dwelling in him" [1.Col.20.] implies a close relationship, rather than identity, while certain other passages suggest the subjection of Christ to God. [1.Cor. 15.] As I suggested above, Dunn's Christology, although arriving at more orthodox conclusions than that of Hick, is nevertheless close to Hick's where Jesus' self-testimony is concerned, and falls short of the claims made for it by Carruthers. It is probable that Hick would not dispute Dunn's conclusion that God manifested himself in Christ in fullness [though not in finality] provided this is understood as a mythological way of expressing the significance of Christ. Neither Dunn's Christology, nor Paul's, entails the ontological or literal identification of Christ with God in the way suggested by Carruthers.

Conclusion

The variety and diversity of opinion regarding the strength or weakness of the biblical evidence in support of the doctrine of the Incarnation is overwhelming. This lack of consensus makes it extremely difficult to make any kind of generalization, beyond the fact that the Incarnation is one interpretation of the events of Scripture. An interpretation may be correct or incorrect, we have no way of knowing unequivocally. It may be conceded that the doctrine is a coherent and plausible development of Christian theology, yet, given the premise of this study, that theology is a human activity, it cannot be beyond human error or human dispute. 86. This legitimizes claims such as Hick's, to question the Church's traditional formulations. Certainly, there is good reason for rejecting the claim that the doctrine of the Incarnation is absolute Revelation itself, free from human interpretation, and we would have good grounds for questioning a theological approach which started from this basis. For although, as I have conceded, historical methodology could not of itself prove the necessity or otherwise of the Incarnation as the only appropriate interpretation of Scripture, the ambiguity of the historical evidence must cause some degree of doubt regarding the absolute nature of Revelation. The mere existence of a substantial body of questioners of the Church's traditional teaching must inevitably affect the positions of those who would argue for the Incarnation as a revealed truth of Scripture. Legitimate reasons for doubt cast in question those who would maintain certainty on the basis of Scriptural Revelation. 87.

Further, we have noted that on the basis of the historical evidence of the life of Jesus, scholars are capable of arriving at quite different conclusions as regards the question of how far the Incarnation is implicit in Scripture; this points both to the limitations of the documentary evidence itself, and to the significance of human interpretation of that evidence.

Philosophical Grounds for criticising the Doctrine of Incarnation

Recent philosophical objections to the doctrine of the Incarnation have centred upon the supposition that the claim that Jesus was both God and man is logically contradictory, that the notion that Christ was uniquely divine cannot be reconciled with an equal emphasis on his humanity. If this is so, it constitutes a formidable objection to the doctrine. Ultimately, Hick takes the stance that the doctrine is indeed self-contradictory, though he examines the issues involved in considerable detail in Chapter 11 of God and the Universe of Faiths before reaching this conclusion. This chapter focuses, initially, on the need to render the doctrine more intelligible and therefore more acceptable to Twentieth Century Christians. He redefines the doctrine, previously expressed by means of a category of substance or being, "homo-ousis," to a category of purpose and action, "agape." God is "agape," it is through his activity that his nature and presence was manifest to the people of Israel, and it is the same "agape," or action, that is found taking place through the life of Jesus Christ. It can be asserted that the action of Christ was a continuum with the action of God, and that the Biblical evidence suggests that Christ was conscious that his love for mankind was identical with the love of God himself, without asserting that he was God "in substance," [whatever that may mean.] It is possible to say of Jesus that he was "wholly God," in that his actions were the actions of God, qualitatively, and as a causal connection, analogous with the emission of a ray of light from the sun, but not "the whole of God," for the divine agape of the Infinite cannot be entirely expressed within the limitations of a spatio-temporal existence. Hick expresses this in the following way;

"...if we say that Jesus' agapeing was numerically identical with God's Agapeing, we do not mean that Jesus' agapeing was the whole of God's Agapeing. The incarnation was, so to speak, a temporal cross-section of God's Agapeing; but as a cross-section is not the entirety of that of which it is a cross-section, so the divine operation seen incarnate on earth was not the entirety of the divine operation. It was, to continue to speak quantitatively, as much of that operation or nature as could be expressed within

the limitations of a particular set of spatio-temporal actions. " 88.

Despite this attempt, not to deny the meaning of the doctrine of Incarnation, but to render it more intelligible philosophically, it is Lash's belief that, *"...according to Hick, the Fathers of Nicaea taught meaningless nonsense."* 89. In fact, Hick is simply drawing attention to a paradox which, undeniably, exists when it is claimed that a historical person has attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence and infinity which are characteristics of "the whole of God," in the Christian understanding. Hick expresses this, in a subsequent publication; *"...how one person can be both eternal and yet born in time, omnipotent and yet with the limited capacity of a human being...is impossible to defend."* 90. Thus, ultimately, Hick parts company with the Incarnationalists. He believes that the intractable philosophical difficulties inherent in the God-man formula are not solved by the adoption of an action Christology; *"...the assertion that Jesus' agapeing was continuous with the Divine Agapeing is no more self-explanatory than the assertion that Christ was of one substance with the Father."* 91.

For Hick, the philosophical difficulties of the concept of Incarnation are insuperable. He is right in thinking that they cannot easily be overcome; the Church has always understood the doctrine of the Incarnation as a paradox, but it is arguable that there is no logical distinction between a paradox, an apparent contradiction, and a real contradiction, unless the paradox is capable of being developed and elaborated in some way. This would explain why Hick's own attempt to redefine the doctrine results, by his own admission, in a stalemate; if the Incarnation harbours a logical contradiction, it is inevitably impossible to develop it beyond the simple formula, "God became man, " which explains why all attempts to develop the doctrine beyond this, throughout Christian history, have been regarded as heresy. 92.

Probably the most forthright and controversial suggestion that the God-man formula is logically incoherent was made by Hick in The Myth of God Incarnate

"...it remains a form of words without assignable meaning. For to say, without explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth

was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square." 93.

This "square circle" analogy has been criticized by Hebblethwaite, on the grounds that "God" and "man" are not precisely defined terms, as are squares and circles. It is Hebblethwaite's contention that "God" and "man" are far from being tightly defined concepts. It is difficult enough to suppose that we have a full and adequate grasp of what it is to be a human being; we certainly have no such grasp of the divine nature. Who are we to say that the essence of God is such as to rule out the possibility of his making himself present in the created world as a human being, while in no way ceasing to be the God he ever is? 94. Hebblethwaite is right to point out that "God" and "man" cannot be precisely defined as word concepts; Hick's analogy is, perhaps, rather exaggerated. It is also true that Christianity has asserted, since before Aquinas, that we cannot know the ontology of God in its fullness and completeness. But this is precisely why Hick's concept of God as both personal and impersonal cannot be ruled out. Elsewhere, Hebblethwaite seems to contradict his own acknowledgement of the limitation of our knowledge of God's nature. Having stated that it is not for us to say what God can or cannot do, he lays down quite clearly in another context, what God cannot do:

"...if God himself, in one of the modes of his being, has come into our world in person...we cannot suppose that he might have done so more than once. For only one man can actually be God to us, if God himself is one." 95.

This might be acceptable if the emphasis was replaced, only one man can be God to us, ie. as Christians, within a historically and culturally conditioned Christian environment. But as it stands, this seems to be a clear case of "wanting it both ways." Hebblethwaite defends the sovereignty of God to become a man if he chooses, in defence of traditional Christian incarnational claims, but then delimits it in saying that he cannot do so more than once, also in defence of Christian claims. Far from having no precise grasp of the divine nature, Hebblethwaite seems to have a grasp that is far too great! He also states, in relation to Hick's objections to the Incarnation;

"...Hick has to reinforce his relativistic view by going on to urge that the notion of one who is both God and man is self-contradictory. But this contradiction was only "discovered" after he had already adopted a relativistic view of God and the Universe of Faiths on other grounds. Such a belated logical discovery does not inspire confidence." 96.

This, however, does not seem to be textually accurate. Surely, as we have seen in our brief examination of Chapter 11 of God and the Universe of Faiths, Hick's belief that the divine "agape" of the Infinite cannot be entirely expressed in a limited human life, is a philosophical objection, conceived initially in the formulation of the Copernican Revolution, rather than belatedly, however invalid Hebblethwaite believes this objection to be.

The Kenotic Theory: the opposing views of Rahner and Morris

The fact is that the Incarnation, in encompassing the idea of the dual nature of Christ, is inherently problematic. We noted, at the beginning of this chapter, that Hick believes that it is impossible for the notion that Christ was uniquely divine to be reconciled with an equal emphasis on his humanity. In order to be truly human Christ must have been limited in nature, as every other human being is limited. To do justice to the true humanity of Christ, the kenotic theory has been developed, in response to a fear that developed in the Nineteenth Century, that traditional Christology may have inadvertently harboured a docetic notion of Christ. The kenotic theory is that, in becoming man, God "emptied" himself of his divinity and, in an exercise of self-limitation, became as any other First Century Palestinian Jew, humanly limited in knowledge and culturally conditioned. However, Jesus, the Son is held to have remained metaphysically one with the Father. Therefore, the question of how the historical Jesus is identified with the pre-existent Christ remains unanswered, for the subject of the emptying is the Divine Logos, not man; thus, a paradox remains.

It must be conceded, however, that Rahner's Christology goes some way towards answering some of the vexed philosophical objections associated with the Incarnation. His Christology, located

within his general theology of transcendental revelation, is a detailed and extremely well-constructed attempt to make meaningful the idea of the Incarnation to man as he experiences himself to be, that is, transcendently orientated towards the mystery of God. He goes to considerable lengths to redefine the "hypostatical union," the union of the divine and human natures of Christ in such a way as to make it more meaningful. The hypostatic union is defined in terms of God's self-communication to man becoming absolute and bringing about the absolute self-transcendence of man:

"...We have already envisaged this hypostatic union implicitly when we see the history of the cosmos and of the spirit reaching that point at which there occurs the absolute self-transcendence of the spirit into God and the absolute self-communication of God in grace and glory to all spiritual subjects." 97.

Jesus Christ, within Rahner's Christology, is the completion and fulfilment of what we are as human beings; viewed in this light, "the Word became flesh" is not a contingent event in history but a historical necessity, the logical fulfilment of our human nature. The hypostatic union is seen as universal in that God's self-communication through Christ is intended for all people, [here, as we shall see later, Rahner's notion of the "anonymous Christian" becomes explicable]- but it is also particular in that, for Rahner, it takes place solely in Christ. The key concept within Rahner's Christology is the idea of grace, within a context of offering and recipient. The offer made by God to us, through grace, in Jesus, *"...is not only established by God but is God himself."* 98. Thus God offers himself to us, and, through the grace in all of us, established by God in our God-orientated nature, we receive him. That God becomes man is essential to Rahner's Christology precisely because of the God-orientation of man's nature; *"...when God wants to be what is not God, man comes to be."* 99.

This, however, is problematic, for it leaves unanswered the vexed philosophical question raised by the notion of the immutability of God, coupled with the idea that he can become "what is not God." Whatever else God is, the notion of God as the one who "is" in an absolute unchanging

sense, is contradicted by the idea of his becoming "what he is not," without ceasing to be God, if the idea of immutability is to have any recognisable meaning. Rahner does in fact acknowledge that this is problematic, but does not offer any explanation of this contradiction other than the simple assertion that, "...it still remains true that the Logos became man." 100. He retreats from the philosophical difficulties of the Incarnation by the statement, "...here, ontology has to be adapted to the message of faith and not be schoolmaster to this message." 101. Thus, he fails, ultimately, to provide a satisfactory solution to this particular philosophical difficulty.

An attempt to overcome the difficulties which arise within kenoticism has been made by Thomas V. Morris, who, in The Logic of God Incarnate constructs a meticulous philosophical defence of the traditional Incarnational formulations. He concedes that the kenotic strategy necessitates abandoning any substantive metaphysical ascription of immutability to God. 102. On these grounds, among others, he rejects kenoticism. He believes, instead, we must recognize two distinct ranges of consciousness, or two "mind-views" of Christ.

"...There is first what we can call the eternal mind of God the Son with its distinctively divine consciousness. And in addition there is a distinctively earthly consciousness that came into existence and grew and developed as the boy Jesus grew and developed." 103.

The "two-minds view" is, Morris believes, a distinct improvement over kenoticism; instead of "emptying himself" in giving up metaphysical attributes essential to Deity, God the Son "takes on" the nature of humanity. However, the question arises, if Morris is correct, whether we have here an acceptable concept of one who is both truly human and truly divine. For surely we want to say of Jesus, in terms of his humanity, that he was truly and normally human, acting in a way that is compatible with normal human psychology. The Biblical testimony affirms this; Jesus ate, slept, wept, was sometimes angry and was humanly compassionate. But Morris' "two-minds" theory undermines this quite seriously, I believe. He draws an analogy [which, on his own admission, can only be a partial analogy] between the minds of Christ and the minds of the human individual

afflicted with the psychological phenomenon of multiple personality, denoting the existence, within a single person, of two or more distinctive streams or ranges of consciousness. 104. I say "afflicted" with deliberation, for, as Morris concedes, the problem with analogizing a "two-minds" theory with the phenomenon of multiple personality is that generally the latter is construed as being a highly undesirable psychological state for the human to be in. Morris believes, however, that when this partial analogy is applied to God the Son, such problems are overcome by the fact that the state is entered into voluntarily, and is conducive to God's purposes for humanity. 105. It seems to me, however, that the parallel with what is generally considered to be abnormal human psychology is both infelicitous and misleading; we want to say of Christ, surely, that he was truly and normally human. Granted that the range of human behaviour that can be considered "normal" is extremely wide, and notoriously difficult to define, it must surely still be the case that it must exclude multiple personality traits. It must surely be considered preferable for the human individual to have a single, integrated mind, than a disintegrated mind, or "two minds", and I believe what we would predicate of the normal human individual we must predicate of Christ if we want to do justice to his full humanity.

Moreover, although Morris immunizes his "two-minds" theory from the charge of Nestorianism by emphasising that he uses the word "mind" to denote what a person has, rather than what he is, it still seems to me that his theory comes perilously close to just such a "heretical" position, or, at least, could easily be construed in this way. 106. As we have noted above, all attempts to expand the bare God-man formula have resulted in the charge of Arianism, Appollinarianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, and so on, which seems to underline the fact that the Christian paradox, being a paradox that is immune to explanation, is in fact a contradiction, or as Hick would wish to assert, a mythological idea rather than a hypothesis that should be understood literally. 107. It is interesting to note that, later in the same publication, Morris dismisses Frances Young's argument that;

"...if Jesus was an entirely normal human being, no evidence can be produced for the incarnation. If no evidence can be produced,

there can be no basis on which to claim that an incarnation took place." 108.

He does this by drawing attention to the distinction between being fully human and being merely human. Jesus can be fully human without being merely human, according to Morris, for the qualification, "merely" does, certainly, suggest that he is in no metaphysical way different from you or I or any other human being. But what is interesting is Morris' transposition of the term "mere humanity," when the reference is actually to "normal humanity." Frances Young does not speak of "mere humanity," but "normal humanity," which must mean something rather different. It must mean thinking and behaving according to acceptable norms of human psychology, [however difficult it may be to define these.] By substituting "normally" for "merely," Morris alters the meaning of what Young is saying: "mere" and "normal" cannot be used synonymously or interchangeably, as Morris seems to be suggesting. For it is quite possible to be merely human and normally human and conversely, equally possible to be merely human and abnormally human. It is precisely the normality of Jesus' humanity that is called into question by the "two-minds" theory.

Hick, in his criticism of Morris' "two-minds" Christology, does not himself object to the idea of the human mind as composite rather than unitary. 109. However, he does highlight the difficulties inherent in this idea as regards that aspect of Jesus' mind which we might call his will, or moral intention. If the determining element of the composite mind is in fact divine [which to my thinking rules out the definition of the man Jesus as fully and normally human] then this element must necessarily override any tendency of the human will of the man Jesus to sin or error. It follows from this that, whether he knew it or not, Jesus was not in fact free to sin, being controlled by the Divine mind of the Son Incarnate. Hick has written of the logical consequences of this theory;

"...such a person could not be tempted as we are tempted, or become good by overcoming temptation, and accordingly could not embody our human moral ideal. Nor - in relation to the

*doctrine of atonement - could his death constitute the sacrifice of
life of perfect human obedience to God." 110.*

It begins to emerge that the difficulties presented by the doctrine of the Incarnation as it is traditionally understood, in safeguarding the full humanity of Christ, are considerable. The suggestion that the "two minds" theory runs into the kind of difficulties associated with early Christian heresy bears comparison with Rahner's own admission that the Chalcedonian idea of the "two natures" of Christ may lead inadvertently to an Apollinarian notion of Christ, a notion of a man walking about with God inside him, a supernatural being capable of performing superhuman deeds contrary to nature. The fact that, strictly speaking, this is a heretical view of Christ has not prevented this being the view that has been presented to the faithful throughout the history of the Church. I quote Rahner at length:

"...if the human nature in the doctrine of the Two Natures is seen merely in the customary sense of a pure "instrument," the possessor of this instrument can no longer be thought of as Mediator. He would simply be Mediator to himself. Any attempt to deal with the question by discussing it in terms of two "moral subjects" would still only provide a verbal solution, because a "nature" conceived in this way could not provide the foundation for a second moral subject - in relation to God, what is more in that everything pertaining to a subject in this moral subject [= human nature] would be precisely the Logos himself, with respect to whom the Mediator is supposed to mediate. But is it possible today to keep sharply before our minds Jesus' true initiative in his human history with respect to God and before God and consequently its immediate empirical subject [in distinction from the metaphysical Person], by using only the word "nature," and that in sharp distinction from that of the divine Person? Or is it not true that the Redemption becomes for all practical purposes

*simply God's act among us, and no longer the act of the
Messianic Mediator between us and God? And is it not true that
the almost unavoidable consequence of all this is a conception
which undoubtedly dominates the popular mind [without of course
reaching the stage of consciously formulated heresy], and which
could be put rather as follows: "When our Lord {= God} walked
on earth with his disciples, still humble and unrecognised...?"*

111.

Here Rahner seems to suggest that the Early Church Fathers, in their attempt to do justice to the significance of Christ, have inadvertently presented us with a Christological formulation which is in serious danger of undermining his full humanity and insufficiently emphasizes what Jesus himself stressed, the presence of God, active and involved with humanity in its limited and finite existence. However, this brings us back full circle to kenoticism, for if we accept this kind of criticism we are left with no alternative other than Rahner's own kenotic concept of Christ, which insists on his full humanity but runs into the kind of problems outlined above, in relation to the immutability of God. It would seem that any and every attempt to expand the God-man formula leads us into "heresy" or incoherence or both.

Alternative Christologies

If we reject the traditional incarnational formulations on the grounds of the philosophical difficulties associated with them, is it still possible to say something positive about God's Revelation in Jesus Christ which does justice to its particularity, concreteness and salvific value? There has been, as Hick has noted, an immense diversification of the modes of Christian thought in recent times. Recent Christological reformulations, which reject the "two natures" or substance Christology of Chalcedon, nevertheless stand up against the charge that the particularity and historical concreteness of Christianity is necessarily undermined by quite radical reformulations of Christian doctrine. It is notable that an emphasis on an ontological approach has lead some theologians, such as Paul Tillich, to reject the Chalcedonian formulations which Rahner himself

only retains with some difficulty, in terms of his reservations regarding their meaningfulness. Tillich's theology centres very much upon the nature of being; God is thought of as "Being itself." [esse ipsum.] *"...If we speak of the actuality of God, we assert that he is not God if he is not being-itself. Other assertions about God can be made theologically only on this basis."* 112.

By his understanding of God as being-itself, Tillich provides an escape route from the vexed God-man dispute, for the nature of God is being-itself, not a being. It follows that;

"...the question of the existence of God can neither be asked nor answered. If asked...the answer - whether negative or affirmative - implicitly denies the nature of God. It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it, God is being itself, not a being." 113.

Tillich is saying that it is incorrect to assert that God exists, for to do so is to reduce him to the level of a being among other beings. Viewed in this way, it becomes impossible to talk of Jesus as partaking of the same substance as God, for God himself is freed from the category of "substance." As noted in chapter 2, Tillich strenuously rejects the Chalcedonian formulation of the two natures of Christ;

"...by eliminating the concept of two natures which lie together like blocks and whose unity cannot be understood at all, we are open to relational concepts which make understandable the dynamic picture of Jesus as the Christ." 114.

Jesus is definitive for Tillich, for he is the focus of what he calls the "New Being." He participates in the being of God, in the sense of the nature of God, as do all men and women, but he is, qualitatively, the best manifestation of the New Being that has been perceived. In the sense of normativeness, therefore, Tillich's Christology is inclusivist, but his Christological model need not be, for it does not, logically, rule out the possibility of what he calls "godmanhood" appearing elsewhere. The concept of "godmanhood" could have a universalist application. For Tillich, the believer, Christ is the "godmanhood," but for religion as "ultimate concern," it would be quite possible for "godmanhood" to appear elsewhere, wherever there is ultimate concern for the

meaning of existence and the salvation of humankind. Tillich's Christological model, therefore, provides a solution to philosophical difficulties associated with the Incarnation, and paves the way for a pluralist theology of religions, in that the absolute superiority of the Christian Revelation no longer follows as a logical corollary of the Christology itself.

Moreover, in terms of his theological structure as a whole, it is notable that there is much affinity between his thought and that of some non-Christian faiths such as Sankara's Advaita. Tillich's idea of the human mind participating in the Ground of its own being, and thus with Being-itself is strikingly similar to the non-dualistic Atman-Brahman idea within Vedantin Hinduism. Tillich's Christological model, could therefore, be adapted by theologians such as Hick, in support of a theology of religious pluralism, as could the Christologies of Donald Baillie and Geoffrey Lampe. 115. These Christologies, as Hick himself notes, provide more meaningful accounts of the reality of God's grace operating fully and effectively in a human life, without the traditional "two natures" formulation which Hick believes;

"...made sense within the philosophical world of the early Christian centuries but which has now become little more than a mysterious formula which is obediently repeated but no longer bears any intrinsic meaningfulness." 116.

Conclusion

The nature and status of Christological language is an extremely complex issue; I have argued, with Hick, that traditional Incarnational language may be incoherent, and that certain philosophical difficulties are not satisfactorily solved even by so well constructed a Christology as Rahner's. There seems to be a case for abandoning the Chalcedonian formulation in favour of a formula that may be more meaningful to the modern mind, which will free Christianity from its traditional exclusivism vis a vis other world faiths. Hick's "action Christology" provides a way of saying how Christ is, definitively, "the way, the truth and the life," for Christians, but need not be for others who experience God, or Ultimate Reality equally and authentically by other means. I have also suggested that Tillich's Christology, among others, provides an acceptable alternative which need not entail that an "a priori" judgement is made, regarding the superiority of Christianity in relation to other exemplifications of God's revelation. Even if the doctrine of the Incarnation is coherent - and I have argued that it may not be - Incarnationalists such as Rahner and Hebblethwaite fail to provide any real reasons why God, if he can become a man, should have done so only once. In many ways, the arguments used by Rahner to increase the relevance of the Incarnation to the modern mind, by seeing it as the fulfilment, through grace, of what is our human potential, seem to make it less likely that this should occur in a once-only human event. This seems inconsistent not only with the Christian axiom of God's universal salvific will, but with the notion of his universal love. God is not God, ie. a God who is of real value to the religious believer, unless his love for humankind is equal and, therefore, his revelation equally authentically available to all men and women.

Theological grounds for criticising the Doctrine of the Incarnation

It has been stated that the theological issue, ie. the implications of the doctrine of Incarnation for the salvation of non-Christians, was a primary concern of Hick's, in formulating his Copernican Revolution, although, as we have seen, he provides good historical and philosophical reasons, also, for rejecting the Chalcedonian formulation. Brian Hebblethwaite concedes that the theological issue is, "...the most persuasive reason for demythologising the Incarnation ... this global ecumenism makes moral and religious sense." 117. However, he qualifies this by saying that one cannot actually proceed other than by examining the doctrine itself, and noting that Christianity has in fact made unique claims on the basis of it, and that these must be retained if the essential character of Christianity is not to be lost. However, if Hebblethwaite is right- and exclusivists and most inclusivists would be in agreement with him - the question remains, how does Christianity account for the salvation of non-Christians? Or are they condemned to perdition according to the ancient exclusivist view, denounced by Hick, that, "...outside the Church, or outside Christianity, there is no salvation." 118. I shall examine this issue in relation to the views of our "representative theologians," Lesslie Newbigin and Karl Rahner.

Lesslie Newbigin

Newbigin's stance can be examined with brevity, for in fact he fails to give any real answer to the question of the salvation of non-Christians. It is Newbigin's belief that this is simply not a proper question. He writes;

"...I confess that I am astounded by the arrogance of theologians who seem to think we are authorized in our capacity as Christians to inform the rest of the world about who is to be vindicated and who is to be condemned at the last judgement." 119.

Thus he is saying that we cannot know if, or how, the salvation of non-Christians comes about; this is not a proper issue for Christian discussion and must be left to the grace of God. One cannot help but feel, however, that Newbigin is using the notion of the transcendence of God, and

condemning the "arrogance" of other theologians, to escape this difficult theological issue. This is hardly satisfactory; in a self-consciously pluralist world, theology, to be credible, must grapple with the tensions that arise in relation to its own axioms, and the salvation of non-Christians. This is not to deny that other exclusivist theologians, such as Lindbeck and DiNoia, have attempted to deal with this issue, and we shall examine Lindbeck's idea of the post-mortem encounter of the non-Christian with Christ in the next chapter, in the context of his cultural-linguistic model for the nature of oppositions in religious truth claims. For the present, however, we will focus upon Karl Rahner's attempt to provide a viable solution to this problem by means of the well-known concept of the "anonymous Christian."

Karl Rahner

In Theological Investigations. Vol.5. Rahner maintains that Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of God, but that the salvation of non-Christians, if it occurs, must occur because of their other religious allegiances, not despite them, since humans are social beings whose beliefs are necessarily formed within the context of their social and historical environment. Here again, we see the strongly anthropological character of Rahner's theology. He believes that non-Christians, who may have accepted God's grace in their hearts may be termed "anonymous Christians", anonymous in that they are not consciously followers of Christ, but "Christian" nevertheless, because the grace of God they have accepted is, axiomatically, for Rahner, that which is definitively revealed by Christ, who is the only means of salvation. 120. Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian draws upon the doctrine of implicit desire, which has a long history within the Christian Church, dating from Augustine, and later, Aquinas, who expanded the dictum of his predecessor with the observation that explicit confession of the mystery of Christ is not necessary for salvation; implicit acceptance may be sufficient for those who have "received no revelation" for, *"...though they did not believe in Him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in divine providence..."* 121. However, the role of implicit belief or implicit desire is valid only until such time as the individual is confronted with the Gospel; *"...after grace had been revealed, both learned and simple folk are bound to explicit faith in the mysteries of*

Christ. " 122. Rahner also upholds a belief in the possibility of the salvation of those who, through no fault of their own, have not received the Gospel of Christ, and also in respect of the essentially provisional nature of the doctrine of implicit desire. Rahner believes Christian mission is not only still necessary, but is actually demanded by the "incarnational and social structure of grace and Christianity" for through mission and explicit acceptance of the Gospel the anonymous Christian may be transformed; "...into someone who also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and in the profession of faith which is given social form in the Church." 123. Hick has noted that it remains the stance of the Roman Catholic Church to promote explicit conversion to Christianity, for a recent encyclical, "Redemptoris Missio", 1990, declares that; "...dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation." [par.55.] 124. Rahner's contributions to the doctrine of implicit belief, which emphasise its conciliatory nature, and make the categories of persons to whom it is applicable less exclusive, are twofold; firstly, he highlights the role of grace in the doctrine of implicit desire, and secondly, he differentiates between the Gospel of Christ being made accessible to the individual, and the individual's actual understanding of it. Rahner believes that God's grace may be present in non-Christian religions. He writes;

"...Until the moment when the Gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion [even outside the Mosaic religion] does not merely contain elements of a natural knowledge of God, elements, moreover mixed up with human depravity which is the result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason a non-Christian religion can be recognised as a lawful religion [although only in different degrees] without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it." 125.

It must be noted that, within Rahner's thinking, the grace that may exist within the non-Christian religion is viewed, specifically, as the same grace that is offered through, and originates, in Christ. [This is a point we shall return to in detail, in Part 2, where it will be particularly relevant to a discussion of the similarity or dissimilarity of the soteriological doctrines of the religions.] For the present, it will be of interest to examine Rahner's analysis of the relationship between belief and understanding in reception of the Gospel of Christ.

Rahner holds that even those who reject the Christian faith may yet be anonymous Christians if they are rejecting that which is imperfectly understood. If Christianity has not reached them, *"...in the real urgency and rigour of actual existence... they cannot be held culpable for unbelief"*. 126. Rahner seems to be suggesting that complete understanding must bring about belief. [Certainly, if it does not, and complete understanding is presupposed, the individual must be considered to be in bad faith, and could no longer be considered an anonymous Christian.] But this close linking of belief with understanding is problematic, for two reasons. Firstly, as Kellenberger suggests, it may be that it is impossible to have explicit belief without complete understanding, belief being the hallmark of the individual's understanding of the Gospel. 127. If this is the case, the "extra ecclesia" doctrine, as applied to those who understand and yet reject the message of Christ, is necessarily defunct, for it can apply to no-one. Conversely, I would suggest, if belief is not necessarily predetermined by, and dependent, on understanding, it is clearly possible to conceive of the existence of those [possibly born and nurtured within the faith] who believe without understanding. What of these? Are they the recipients of God's grace and therefore saved, despite the fact that they believe that which they do not understand? Rahner, by his own axioms relating to the universality of grace, would have to answer in the affirmative, but he would also have to concede that this seriously undermines the Christian axiom of the universal salvific will of God, for those believers who believe without understanding would seem to be recipients of what may be termed "salvific advantage," derived, presumably, through the accident of birth.

The term "anonymous Christian" has been criticized by Hick, who calls it, *"too manifestly an ad hoc contrivance to satisfy many."* 128. It is also rejected by Küng who believes it to be offensive

to non-Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and others who, empirically, may have no leanings towards Christianity: *"...the non-Christian...cannot be silently adopted by Christianity. Man's free will must be respected."* 129. D'Costa, however, believes that the concept of the "anonymous Christian" is acceptable, in that it is an inner reflection, not one outwardly promoted towards believers of other faiths: *"...it is addressed by a Christian to his or her, and the Church's own self-understanding."* 130. What is questionable, here, is whether one's own self-understanding must not necessarily affect one's attitude towards others, in inter-faith dialogue. Given that the theologian and believer is simply a human thinker, how far can he or she isolate a self-understanding from an understanding of others with the kind of objectivity that seems to be suggested? Rahner, clearly, believes fruitful inter-faith dialogue is facilitated by the idea of the "anonymous Christian;" he concedes the possibility of grace in other religions, while acknowledging their real differences. Hick, however, believes that in fact, it actually blocks dialogue, since the term can be reversed, and Christians can just as easily be labelled "anonymous Hindus or Muslims." 131.

It does seem, in fact, that Rahner prejudges the outcome of dialogue, and, if this is so, it is not easy to see how it can be maintained that truly open-ended dialogue is facilitated. As we have noted, he believes that, when truly confronted with the Gospel, other religions must, in the course of time, lose their validity, and concede the greater revelation that is in Christianity:

"...the individual who grasps Christianity in a clearer, purer and more reflective way has, other things being equal, a still greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian." 132.

It is explicitly stated that the notion of "anonymous Christian" can only be properly applied to those "anonymous Christians" who have not heard, or have heard but not understood, the Gospel, not to those countless thousands who, having been exposed to the Christian message, nevertheless adhere to other faiths. As G.D'Costa has pointed out, it would be extremely difficult to locate an instance in which it could be maintained that an individual had been truly confronted with the Gospel, to the point of perfect understanding, while nevertheless rejecting it, but it is clear that,

if and when such a situation should occur, it would be impossible, subsequently, to regard such an individual as an "anonymous Christian." 133. In answer to the question, "why might such a situation occur?" the inclusivist answer must necessarily be that the individual, in freely rejecting the authentic revelation of God, was committing a grave sin. This seems tantamount to saying that, since the inclusivist knows Christianity to be true, other faiths, while they contain some truth, are less true, by logical inference. But the ground between a cogent theoretical position and the inferences drawn from it, is filled with pitfalls. On practical investigation, it is frequently found that the logical inference does not remain credible, and this is what Hick found, through experience, to be the case. 134. Empiricism, while demonstrating that Christianity is a real and living force in the lives of many people, enabling them to know God, equally asserts that this is the case with other religions. So far as it is possible to judge, through observation, the evidence is overwhelming that God is in fact present in the lives of many Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, to an equally authentic extent. This might account for the rejection of the Christian gospel by the hypothetical "anonymous Christian," who, in the words of Troeltsch;

"...may experience their contact with the Divine Life in quite a different way, and may also possess a religion which has grown up with them and from which they cannot sever themselves so long as they remain what they are." 135.

Conclusion

I have dealt with the exclusivist stance in relation to the question of the salvation of non-Christians briefly, since a common response is that we simply do not know if, or how, they are saved: other exclusivist responses will be examined in the next chapter. Inclusivists such as Rahner, while finding ways of accounting for the salvation of non-Christians, tend to underestimate the significance of the anthropological and religious conditioning of the individual, which may in fact make it impossible for the potential "anonymous Christian" to be "truly" confronted with the Christian Gospel. The mind of the non-Christian is, after all, not a blank page; Rahner himself concedes that an individual can only begin with what he is and what he already believes. *136*. This is not to deny the existence of human free will, nor does it necessitate the total relativism of all religious truth. Hick's idea of the innate moral awareness of humankind presupposes that, for example, if the non-Christian was a member of an innately immoral and abhorrent sect or group, he or she might well be receptive to the Gospel. But if, on the other hand, he or she was an adherent of another world faith of venerable traditions, already experiencing God or Ultimate Reality as present in his or her life, the Gospel message would appear interesting, perhaps, but essentially superfluous. *137*. Hick's concern is not to say that whatever is sincerely believed and practised is, by definition, true. *138*. But he does say that the merit of each phenomenal religion must be judged in terms of objective moral criteria, and in terms of its efficacy in promoting the moral and spiritual development of the individual. *139*. How far it is possible to define "objective moral criteria," in view of the humanist argument that such criteria are purely human constructs, it will be necessary to explore in Part 2, after the examination of further problems associated with religious pluralism.

CHAPTER 4 NOTES.

1. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. London. Macmillan. 1973. p.149.
2. Other pluralists such as P.Knitter and A. Race also hold to a non-Incarnational Christology, as do some inclusivists, such as P.Tillich.
3. N.Pittenger. The Word Incarnate. New York. Nisbet and Harper and Row. 1959. p.39.
4. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.168.
5. W.Pannenberg. Basic Questions in Theology vol.3. Myth in Biblical and Christian Tradition. London. S.C.M. 1973. pp.71-72.
6. R.C.Crawford. The Saga of God Incarnate. Pretoria. University of South Africa. p.8.
7. Brunner. The Mediator. Lutterworth. 1934. p.391. See pp.372-396 "The Mythology of Christianity", the appendix of the same publication, for his general acceptance of the category of myth.
8. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. London. Macmillan. 1989. p.347.
9. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. pp 165-166
10. ibid. pp.170-171. Also p.179.
11. ibid. pp.167-167.
12. ibid. p.24.
13. ibid. pp.176-177.
14. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.350.
15. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. Oxford. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. 1986. p.34.
16. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.348.
17. ibid. pp.350-351.
18. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.24.
19. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.24.
20. J.A.T.Robinson suggests that the choice of the title of ed. M.Green's The Truth of God Incarnate. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, in reply to "The Myth," was a deliberate strategy, suggesting that "myth" is the antithesis of truth. J.A.T.Robinson. Truth is Two-Eyed. London. S.C.M. 1979. p.120.

21. ed.M.Goulder. Incarnation and Myth - the Debate Continued. London. S.C.M. 1975. p.22.
22. J.Hick. The Myth of God Incarnate. London. S.C.M. 1977. p.175.
23. See Chapter 2 of this study.
24. J.Hick. The Metaphor of God Incarnate. London. S.C.M. 1993. p.99.
25. *ibid.* p.9. Hick understands his own christology as incarnational in this "weak" sense, drawing on the six-fold distinction made by S. Coakley, of the senses in which Christian theology can be said to be "incarnational." S.Coakley. Christ Without Absolutes. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1988. pp.104-106.
26. J.Hick. The Metaphor of God Incarnate. p.105.
27. J.M. Soskice. Metaphor and Religious Language. Oxford. Clarendon. 1987. p.24.
28. *ibid.* p.27.
29. *ibid.* p.44.
30. *ibid.* p.49.
31. *ibid.* p.53.
32. G.Loughlin. "Squares and Circles," in ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Critical Studies of the work of John Hick. London. Macmillan. 1991. p.191.
33. C.Gillis. A Question of Final Belief. John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation. London. Macmillan. 1989. p.151.
34. *ibid.* p.134.
35. *ibid.* pp.135-137.
36. *ibid.* p.160 Gillis states that R.Herschberger, W.M.Urban, A.M.Paul and Monroe Beardsley, among others, are opposed to the "irreducibility thesis" in relation to metaphor, but he does not engage in debate with them or explore their views.
37. *ibid.* p.5.
38. *ibid.* p.66.
39. ed. J.Hick. The Myth of God Incarnate. p.175.
40. C.Gillis. A Question of Final Belief, quoting Hick, "Is Religion an American Heresy?" Theology Today, 18, 1. (1961) 6.

41. *ibid.* p.174

42. ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. p.52

43. *ibid.*

44. G.H.Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. An Elaboration and Evaluation of the Position of John Hick. Boston. University Press of America. 1990. p.168.

45. J.Hick. God Has Many Names. Philadelphia. Westminster. 1982. pp.74-75. Hick makes similar statements about the significance of Christ in, God and the Universe of Faiths, pp.176-177, and in The Myth of God Incarnate, pp.178-179.

46. G.H.Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. p.146.

47. *ibid.* p.228. Longeran's theory of differentiated consciousness requires some explanation. Fundamentally, the distinction between "undifferentiated consciousness" [common sense] and "differentiated consciousness" [theory] relates to the distinction which may be made between description and understanding, and to the kind of question raised by the seeker of knowledge. The New Testament language sought to describe Jesus in terms of the question, "who is Jesus for our salvation?" In this kind of question the knower is concerned with things as they relate to himself or herself. A descriptive or "common sense" answer suffices. The shift occurs when the seeker of knowledge concerns himself or herself with things as they relate to each other. A different kind of question is asked; "if Jesus is who we claim he is, what does this mean for who he is in relation to the Father?" At this stage of enquiry, a theoretical, ie. dogmatic answer is appropriate, as in the language of Nicea, for explanation is required by the seeker of knowledge. This, however, does not invalidate or cancel out the common sense answer, but extrapolates from it; the meaning remains literal in either case, for, in Longeran's words,

"...No change from one pattern of consciousness to another can make what is true false, or what is false, true."

[quoted in *ibid.* p.231.] See Longeran's Method in Theology. London. Darton, Longman and Todd. 1973, for further explanation of his theological theory.

48. *ibid.* p.260.
49. *ibid.* p.298.
50. J.Hick. Arguments for the Existence of God. London. Macmillan. 1970. pp.117-120.
51. G.H. Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. p.34.
52. J.Hick. The Myth of God Incarnate. p.167.
53. J.Hick's reply to Loughlin in I.Hamnett. Religious Pluralism and Unbelief. Studies Critical and Comparative. London. Routledge. London. 1990. p.207.
54. J.N.Anderson. The Mystery of the Incarnation. London. Hodder and Stoughton. 1978. p.64.
55. J.Hick. The Rainbow of Faiths. London. S.C.M. London. 1995. p.91
56. *ibid.* p.126.
57. J.D.G.Dunn. The Evidence for Jesus. London. S.C.M. 1985. In chapters 1 and 3 he details the methodology of historical reconstruction, relating this to biblical evidence.
58. In fact, some exclusivist theologians, notably, Karl Barth, believe the quest for the historical Jesus is wholly erroneous, and strenuously reject the findings of New Testament scholarship. However, this seems rather strange on the part of a theology that wishes to root itself in biblical Revelation, and, as we have seen, uses biblical texts to support its exclusivist stance. [See Chapter 2.]
59. P.Knitter. No Other Name. London. S.C.M. 1985. p.173.
60. M.Wiles. The Remaking of Christian Doctrine. London. S.C.M. 1974. p.49.
61. G.D'Costa. John Hick's Theology of Religions. p.131.
62. C.F.D.Moule. The Origins of Christology. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1977.
63. M.Wiles. The Remaking of Christian Doctrine. Also, "Christianity without Incarnation", from The Myth of God Incarnate. p.4.
64. K.Runia. The Present Day Christological Debate. Leicester. Intervarsity. 1984. p.89.
65. *ibid.* p.80.
66. F.Young. "A Cloud of Witnesses," from The Myth of God Incarnate. p.14.
67. B.Hebblethwaite. The Incarnation. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1987. p.101.

68. J.Hick. The Myth of God Incarnate. p.172. Also, God and The Universe of Faiths. pp.114-115.
69. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. p.32.
70. J.Hick. "The Reconstruction of Christian Belief." in Theology 73. 1970. pp.404 f.
71. J.A.T.Robinson. Truth is Two-Eyed. London. S.C.M. 1979. pp.105-106.
72. K.Runia. The Present day Christological Debate. Leicester. Intervarsity. 1984. p.96.
73. B.Hebblethwaite. The Incarnation. p.69.
74. F.Young. " A Cloud of Witnesses," from The Myth of God Incarnate. p.23.
75. H.Küng. "Christianity and World Religions: Dialogue with Islam". in ed. L.Swidler. Towards a Universal Theology of Religion. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1987. pp.205-207.
76. P.Knitter. "Hans Küng's Theological Rubicon". in, ibid. pp.224-229.
77. J.D.G.Dunn. Christology in the Making. London. S.C.M. 1980. p.260.
78. G.D'Costa. John Hick's Theology of Religions. p.131.
79. C.F.D.Moule. The Origins of Christology. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1977.
80. ibid. p.158.
81. J.D.G.Dunn. Christology in the Making. p.253.
82. G.H. Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. Boston. University Press of America. 1990. p.152.
83. ibid. p.151.
84. J.D.G.Dunn. Christology in the Making. p.212. Quoted in G.H. Carruthers. p.196.
85. G.H.Carruthers. The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the Theocentric Model of the Christian Theology of World Religions. p.196.
86. Although, traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church has affirmed its immunity, through the Holy Spirit, from "fundamental error," this view is not held by all Catholic theologians, notably, Hans Küng. See chapter 4, "The Opportunities of Fallible Magisterium", in, The Church - Maintained in Truth. London. S.C.M. 1980.

87. This would be a legitimate criticism of much exclusivist theology, notably, that of Barth, which upholds the absolute truth of Scriptural Revelation, while denying the need for support in New Testament exegesis.
88. J.Hick. God and The Universe of Faiths. p.159.
89. ed. M. Goulder. Incarnation and Myth - the Debate Continued. p.22.
90. J.Hick. The Second Christianity. London. S.C.M. 1983. p.31.
91. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.165.
92. ibid. p.179.
93. J.Hick. The Myth of God Incarnate. p.178.
94. B.Hebblethwaite. The Incarnation. p.3.
95. ibid. p.50.
96. ibid. p.8.
97. K.Rahner. Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity. Darton, Longman & Todd. 1978. p.200.
98. ibid. p.202.
99. ibid. p.225.
100. ibid. p.220.
101. ibid. p.221.
102. T.V.Morris. The Logic of God Incarnate. New York. Ithaca. London. Cornell University Press. 1986. p.93.
103. ibid. pp. 102-103.
104. ibid. p.105.
105. ibid. p.107.
106. ibid. p.102.
107. J. Hick. God and The Universe of Faiths. pp.170-172.
108. T.V. Morris. The Logic Of God Incarnate. p.192-193.
109. J.Hick. The Metaphor of God Incarnate. p.59.
110. ibid.

111. K.Rahner. "Current Problems in Christology." Theological Investigations. Vol.1. Chapter 5. pp.156-157. and also appended note.
112. P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. 2. London. Nisbet. 1968. Chicago. University of Chicago Press. 1951. p.114.
113. Tillich defines religion as "ultimate concern."
- "...The religious concern is ultimate; it excludes all other concerns from ultimate significance; it makes them preliminary...The unconditional concern is total; no part of ourselves or our world is excluded from it; there is no "place" to flee from it. the total concern is infinite: no moment of relaxation and rest is possible in the face of a religious concern that is ultimate, unconditional, total and infinite."*
- P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. 1. pp.11-12.
114. P.Tillich. Systematic Theology. 2. p.170.
115. See D.M.Baillie. God was in Christ. London. Faber and Faber. 1948. Also, G.Lampe. God as Spirit. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1977.
116. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.60.
117. B.Hebblethwaite. The Incarnation. p.7.
118. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.121.
119. L.Newbigin. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. London. S.P.C.K. 1989. p.179. He makes the same point in The Open Secret. Michigan. W.B.Eerdmanns. pp.88-89.
120. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. vol.5. pp.130-131.
121. Aquinas. Summa Theologica 11-11. q.2.a.7. A.C. Pegis. [ed.] The Basic Writings of St.Thomas Aquinas 11. 1083-5. N. York. Random House. 1945.
122. *ibid*.
123. K. Rahner. Theological Investigations. vol.5. p.132.
124. J. Hick. The Metaphor of God Incarnate. pp.87-88.
125. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. Vol.5. p.121.

126. *ibid.*

127. J.Kellenberger. God-Relationships With and Without God. London. Macmillan 1989. p.106.

128. J.Hick. God has Many Names. Philadelphia. Westminster. 1982. p.27.

129. H.Küng. The Church. London. Search Press. 1981. p.317.

130. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. p.89.

131. J.Hick. God has Many Names. p.27. Also, God and the Universe of Faiths. p.131. This view is shared by H.Küng. On Being a Christian. N.York. Doubleday. London. Collins. 1976. pp.77-78. Also by A.Race. Christians and Religious Pluralism. London. S.C.M. 1983. pp.45-62.

132. K.Rahner. Theological Investigations. vol.5. p.132.

133. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. p.110.

134. J.Hick. God has Many Names. p.5.

135. E.Troeltsch. Christianity and other Religions. ed.J.Hick and B.Hebblethwaite. London. Collins. 1980. p.25.

136. K.Heinz-weger. Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Theology. [trans. D.Smith.] London. Burns and Oates. 1980. p.145.

137. It is notable that Christian mission has been relatively successful where "primitive" religion exists, but considerably less so in parts of the world with developed traditions, such as Hinduism. J.Hick. Truth and Dialogue. p.148.

138. *ibid.* p. 148.

139. J. Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.86. Also, An Interpretation of Religion. p.340.

CHAPTER 5

Cognitive, Non Cognitive and Mythological Approaches to the Problem of Oppositions in Religious Truth Claims

Hick's radical revision of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation has had inevitable implications for Christian self-understanding; it has been suggested that the pluralist hypothesis, in its perception of Christianity as one-among-many world faiths, each potentially equally efficacious as paths towards knowledge and salvation of God, or Ultimate Reality, overlooks or minimizes genuinely conflicting religious truth claims. In doing so, it undermines the status of truth-content in Christian belief, encapsulated in essential Christian doctrines, and is thus unacceptable to the mainstream of Christianity. [Equally, it involves a reductionist approach to the central truth claims of other traditions, and would thus be unacceptable to them also.] 1. It will be the purpose of this chapter to refute this major criticism by examining the nature, status and function of doctrines within the Christian faith, in juxtaposition with Hick's thesis that historical and cultural factors play a major role in shaping the particular doctrines of a given religious community.

Hick's Approach to the Problem of Conflicting Truth Claims

Hick states that;

"...the basic hypothesis which suggests itself is that the different streams of religious experience represent diverse awareness of the same transcendent reality, which is perceived in characteristically different ways by different human mentalities, formed by and forming different cultural histories... One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances." 2.

Although, as we shall see, Hick acknowledges that propositional truth claims are certainly encapsulated within doctrinal schemes, the doctrines themselves do not constitute absolute human

truth, free from human interpretation. The nature of doctrines themselves is such that they are human constructs, subject to the anthropological conditioning of all theological thinking. While they may provide paths towards the ultimate truth which is transcendent and beyond human knowledge, they are not absolute truth itself, and, however venerable, should not be considered immutable. Within Hick's framework of understanding of the status of religious doctrines, the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ is not viewed as divine in origin, it is viewed as a human conceptual formulation, subject to the limitations and possible error of all human thinking. Belief in the absolute claims of certain doctrines within a particular phenomenal religion which, by logical inference, denies the truth of other groups' claims, is nothing other than a human hypothesis which is denied by the most rudimentary examination of the totality of human experience. 3. This, as we shall see, is in many ways an extension of Hick's earlier views on epistemology in relation to the problem of religious pluralism, and is consistent with his revisionist approach to the concept of revelation, outlined in Chapter 1. His thesis is that what is ultimately Real may be experienced within the religious traditions in a variety of ways that are nevertheless genuine manifestations of the same Reality, and, further, that the ontological status of Ultimate Reality is such as to make it possible for both personal and non-personal human accounts to be equally authentic. How far this thesis overcomes what appear to be genuinely conflicting religious truth claims will be the question we shall consider in this chapter.

Hick acknowledges that, typically, religious communities construct and assert statements of belief in natural language; these statements are generally considered to have a cognitive dimension, the statements of belief constitute claims to knowledge, and are frequently based upon some alleged inerrant text, or authority figure. This notion of the cognitive status of religious doctrines is specifically associated with the propositional view of truth; the religious believer, in making the statement, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," is asserting the truth of the proposition expressed in that sentence. Clearly, it seems to be possible, given that doctrines are about claims for knowledge, for the doctrines of one religious community to be incompatible with those of another, for the Christian doctrine as expressed above is clearly

opposed by the Buddhist denial of the existence of God. Opposing doctrinal positions are clearly existent. However, an anthropological approach to this problem must necessarily emphasize that although each group is making claims that are, in essence, expressions of knowledge, the very fact of disagreement as to what is or is not "truth" seems to imply that this "knowledge" is provisional and less than absolute.

The basic fact of oppositions in religious doctrines is acknowledged by Hick, in fact he has formulated a schema for the examination of their various types and levels. 4. His objective, in doing so, is to determine how far they undermine the pluralist hypothesis. Firstly, he writes, there are differences of belief concerning straightforward matters of historical fact, an obvious example being the Christian belief that Jesus died on the cross, which is refuted by the Muslim belief that, *"...they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them."* [The Qur'an.4.156.] This, and other disputes concerning historical events could in theory be settled by historical methodology, ie. through historical reconstruction by means of documentary evidence. In practice, however, the fragmentary and inconclusive nature of the evidence available means that no amount of scriptural exegesis is likely to result in definitive answers, therefore such matters tend to be "settled" by theological considerations. Hick concedes that for some believers, for whom the pluralist hypothesis may be inaccessible, these matters may be of crucial importance, but for many others they are not of the essence of faith. 5.

Secondly, there are those truth claims which Hick defines in terms of the idea of "trans-historical fact," which, as we shall see, he believes are better understood as true or false religious myths, rather than true or false factual assertions. 6. According to Hick, trans-historical truth claims deal with matters that are in principle verifiable or falsifiable, but cannot be verified or falsified according to the present state of human knowledge. 7. Some trans-historical truth claims are specific to particular religions, and derive from simple historical facts, for example, the doctrinal statement "Jesus was crucified" is a historical fact which could, theoretically, be subjected to historical methodology for confirmation or disconfirmation, but the more complex theological

derivation from this, "Jesus died for the salvation of mankind," could not be so subjected. 8. Nevertheless, it still remains true that, here, we are considering what is ultimately a matter of fact, there must in principle be true answers to questions which derive from this and other issues which are not specific to particular faiths. For example, all religions make doctrinal statements about afterlife, the Western traditions generally affirming the fate of the individual soul in terms of the concepts of heaven and hell, while many [though not all] of the Eastern traditions affirm we are reborn many times on this earth. Again although there must be true answers to questions posed by afterlife beliefs, we are not, in this life, able to confirm or disconfirm any particular set of beliefs, although such matters may be subject to eschatological verification. 9. For the believer within a particular religious community, trans-historical truth claims are "verified" ie. acquire the status of knowledge, with reference to particular scriptures or authority figures. The notion of eschatological verification allows that, ultimately, such claims will be verified, beyond present existence. In this life, however, specific religious truth claims do not have the status of inerrancy or absolute authority for non-believers. No universal acknowledgement of the truth or falsity of such religious doctrines is attainable. 10.

Thirdly, there are what may be termed ontological disagreements, that is, profound differences in our ways of conceiving Reality, which manifest themselves in the major split between those faiths which conceive the divine as personal and those whose awareness focuses on the impersonal. Hick, as we shall see, approaches this type of conflict from the pluralist presupposition that each of these conceptions is a partial, incomplete image of the totality of the Real, which is beyond the limits of human understanding and conception. His hypothesis is that;

"...in conjunction with the principle that it is rational for people within each tradition to trust their own form of religious experience...the infinite Real, in itself beyond the scope of other than purely formal concepts, is differently conceived, experienced and responded to from within the different cultural ways of being human." 11.

Clearly, Hick is very far from denying the existence of oppositions in religious doctrines. However, he differs from many theologians in that he does not believe the fact of conflict of this nature is of very great significance. He asserts this because the "knowledge" expressed in doctrinal statements is not indubitable. He does not believe salvation can be dependent on the truth or falsity of doctrinal statements about which we have no definitive information. We cannot be held culpable for ignorance of this kind, therefore it seems implausible to suggest that "knowledge" is necessary for salvation/liberation. His general conclusion in respect of the facts of conflicting truth claims is that;

"...Such beliefs concerning trans-historical fact vary in importance within the belief-system to which they belong; and at the top end of the scale they may be indispensable to a given doctrinal structure. It does not however follow that structure is itself indispensable for salvation /liberation. On the contrary, it suggests otherwise: for it seems implausible that our final destiny should depend upon our professing beliefs about matters of trans-historical fact concerning which we have no definitive information. It seems more likely that both correct and incorrect trans-historical beliefs, like correct and incorrect historical and scientific beliefs, can form part of a religious totality that mediates the Real to human beings, constituting an effective context within which the salvific process occurs." 12.

It will be necessary, presently, to examine Hick's thesis in this respect in more detail. However, at this point, it may be profitable to examine an alternative approach to the problem of conflicting religious truth claims, which, it is claimed, provides an "escape route" to such conflicts altogether, by means of a non-cognitive approach to religious language. This approach has been the subject of considerable interest in recent times. However, our purpose in examining the non-cognitive approach to religious language will be, ultimately, to demonstrate that, far from providing a solution to the problem of conflicting religious truth claims, it undermines the notion of religious

truth itself, by lapsing into a fideistic or possibly even Feuerbachian approach to religion, in which truth claims are viewed as being regulated and determined by the human constructs of language and culture, and thus, cease to exist as mind-independent realities.

An Alternative Approach to Oppositions in Religious Truth Claims: The Non-Cognitive Approach to Religious Language

An approach to the problem of oppositions in religious doctrines that draws heavily on Wittgensteinian insights into the nature of religious language has been developed in recent times by G.A.Lindbeck, in The Nature of Doctrine - Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age. ¹³ Lindbeck is concerned with the possibility of fruitful inter-religious dialogue; he differentiates between the cognitive approach to religious doctrines, which views religious beliefs as the acceptance of propositional truths, and what he calls the experiential -expressive approach, by which religious doctrines are seen as non-discursive and non-informative symbols of the interpretation of human experience. ¹⁴ He believes some modern theologians, notably, Rahner, have adopted an approach which synthesizes these two theories. ¹⁵ Lindbeck's own contribution to the doctrinal debate is the suggestion of what he has called the "cultural-linguistic alternative," which, he believes, makes possible the understanding and reconciliation of doctrinal disagreement without capitulation. In the case of the cognitive approach, this is impossible, because the truth claims of doctrines are held to be immutable, while the emphasis of the experiential-expressive approach is rejected by Lindbeck, because according to him, it fails to account for the real relationship between experience and culture.

It is Lindbeck's belief that we do not experience first and then express; he reverses this order and accords primacy to cultural/linguistic systems which shape and determine what our experience will be. Lindbeck's alternative approach treats religions as cultural-linguistic systems in which patterns of belief, ritual and action actually constitute the existential self-understanding of the human being.

For Lindbeck, religion is a system of cultural-linguistic "rules;" the patterns of religious ritual and belief within the system give shape and form to experience.

"...Religion, one might say, is that ultimate dimension of culture, which gives shape and intensity to the experiential matrix from which significant cultural achievements flow." 16.

He believes the cultural-linguistic model is able to accommodate and combine features from the other models; to say that doctrines are regulative devices is not to deny that they involve propositions. Within the cultural-linguistic model, however, propositions are held to be "intrasystematic" rather than ontological truth claims, they do not have the status of first-order statements of what is the case universally, as would be claimed by some cognitivists. 17. Given the view that cultural and linguistic forms shape and in a sense constitute human experience, this is an "outside-inwards" approach, as opposed to the experiential-expressive approach, which stresses an "inwards-outside" view, that the experience of religion is diversely articulated through different religions which nevertheless share a common experiential core. It is Lindbeck's belief that there is no common experiential core; religions produce divergent experiences of what it is to be human.

This differs considerably from Hick's understanding of religious experience; Hick is reliant on the idea of there being a common-core of religious experience, diversely articulated through the phenomenal religions, not only in support of the pluralist hypothesis but in support of the existence of God/Transcendental Reality itself. 18. Hick does not deny that religious experiences differ from one another;

"...the religious experiencing of life can itself take different forms. The world may be experienced as God's handiwork, or as the battlefield of good and evil, or as the cosmic dance of Shiva...and so on. These are different forms of religious experiencing-as." 19.

What he does suggest is that such differences are attributable to the different human cultures which condition religious experience, and that despite such differences, all religious experience is a

response to the one Ultimate Reality. 20. While Hick would be in agreement that what we experience is conditioned by the historical and cultural situation in which we find ourselves, he would, I believe, fall short of asserting that what we experience is absolutely determined by the historical, cultural and linguistic framework. To assert otherwise would not only deny the possibility of a common-core of religious experience, it would also considerably undermine the primacy of religious experience as an epistemological doctrine.

However, the implication of Lindbeck's thinking does seem to be that religious experience is ultimately determined by culture and linguistics. Within Lindbeck's thinking, the dominant direction of influence in the complex interrelationship between culture, experience and linguistic expression, is always and invariably from language and culture. He writes;

"...A religion is above all an external word, a "verbum externum" that moulds and shapes the self and its world, rather than an expression ... of a preexisting self or preconceptual experience."

21.

Thus, according to Lindbeck, the linguistic framework, ritual and practice of one's inherited religious tradition will determine how one experiences religiously. On these terms, it must be impossible to engage with, or learn from, any faith tradition other than one's own, for one cannot enter into the "experiential heart" of a faith tradition unless one has adopted it. Thus, the ultimate result of Lindbeck's thesis, which emphasises the incommensurability of faiths, is a fideistic position. 22. John Milbank, who also holds strong notions of the incommensurability of faiths, directs his criticisms of Lindbeck's thesis towards its fideistic implications. Milbank believes Lindbeck is right to insist that it is through the narrative of revelation that God is identified for us. 23. However, he believes that Lindbeck misunderstands the structural complexity of narrative, and develops a kind of "meta-narrative realism" by which the Gospel narrative is severed from its historical roots. According to Milbank, Lindbeck grafts "paradigmatic functions" upon the Gospels, which thereby become stories privileged by faith, the regulators and interpreters of all other stories. Milbank believes this is to lapse into fideism; the Christian narrative, in being

incorporated into a variety of conceptual schemes and social situations, is unable "...to exert a critical influence upon its cultural receptacles, nor for these in turn to criticize Christianity." 24. Ultimately, according to Milbank, what is genuinely historical cannot become paradigmatic without diluting its specificity and temporal and historical character.

One could even argue further, that Lindbeck's thesis leads, ultimately, to a Feuerbachian position in which it is difficult to sustain a realist conception of God as the object of experience. To argue, as Lindbeck does, that religious experience is actually constructed and determined by culture, rather than influenced by culture, is ultimately to empty experience of any authentic claim to cognitive content. If Lindbeck is right, and linguistic structures and religious "rules" actually construct reality and the existential self-understanding of he or she who experiences, by what criteria could religious experience be held to be authentic experience? It is arguable that what is experienced could only be the culturally and linguistically conditioned human projection of he or she who experiences. Thus, an assertion of the primacy of culture/linguistics in determining the experience of religion ultimately leads us to a Feuerbachian position in which such experience is to be viewed simply as a human construct, projected via the determining factors of culture and language. Ultimately, a realist conception of the object of experience becomes untenable, if that object is constructed by the "rules" of religion and the cultural/linguistic structure.

The suggestion I am making is that Lindbeck's view, that the cultural linguistic or doctrinal system is prior to, and determinative of experience, is highly contentious. It is his belief that it is through the "rules" of religion that reality and value systems are constructed. He makes a useful analogy between learning the rules of religion and learning the rules of language, which conforms with the work of linguists such as Noam Chomsky, who has shown that, without certain word concepts, meaning itself is prohibited. 25. The Inuit child, for example, who possesses many different word-concepts to express the idea of "snow," is able to attach a very much greater range of meaning to this concept than is the English language speaker. Word-concepts, thus, seem to be instrumental in shaping thought. Yet it could equally be argued that experience functions to

necessitate the formulation of a wider range of word-concepts. Word-concepts symbolize reality, but reality itself in the sense of meta-linguistic experience may be the key factor in the construction of linguistic systems. The point could be illustrated by a purely fictitious story. Suppose, for example, the existence of a simple society entirely dependent on the snake for economic survival. The people of this society hunt the snake, eat snake meat, use snake skin for clothing and snakes' teeth for tools. [They would, presumably, make use of snakes' bones if there were any!] This entirely snake-dependent community would presumably develop a vocabulary of "snakedom": they would have words for snake meat in its raw and cooked forms and words to describe snakeskin in its natural and cured forms. They might also acquire a complex linguistic system in relation to the metaphysics of the snake, and snake-worship, that would be inexplicable to persons living outside this community. The point surely is that, were such a linguistic system to develop, the key factor in its formulation must be the experience of the people of the community. Words encapsulate and describe experience because of the necessity of communication of shared experience, which is a requisite for communal survival. This example, though an extreme and entirely fictitious one, is nevertheless illustrative of the fact that experience cannot easily be discounted in the formulation of linguistic structures.

It is probable that a complex reciprocal relationship exists between linguistic expression and experience; what we seem to have here is a "chicken-egg" situation in which it is by no means easy to be sure that one always precedes the other or to determine a dominant direction of influence that is necessarily and invariably operative. How can Lindbeck be so sure that the dominant direction of influence is from language and culture? The problem that arises, if he is right, can be illustrated in the context of the particular doctrine that is of interest to us, that of the Incarnation. If it is the case that the cultural linguistic system shapes and determines the nature of experience, this leads, logically, to a situation in which Christians would be obliged to affirm the prior existence of a linguistic framework which was determinative in the later expression of the Easter experience. In other words, they would have to say that the previously existent doctrinal/linguistic conceptualization of "an Incarnate Son of God" shaped and determined the

disciples' experience of Christ's life and death and the subsequent thinking of the Early Church. While it has certainly been argued that the thought forms of the Ancient World functioned in this way, most Christians would want to dispute this. They would want to affirm, rather, that the doctrine of the Incarnation derives from the attempts of the Early Fathers to find language which would do justice to the uniqueness of Christ and assert his ontological status as Son of God. In other words, they would want to say that, at least in this important instance, experience was the primary determinative influence.

Lindbeck himself uses the doctrine of the Incarnation as a "test case" for his cultural/linguistic theory. He suggests that the Nicean formulation was in fact an agreement among the Early Church Fathers to speak in a certain way, of Christ, rather than to attach ontological significance to him as "vere deus and vere homo"; "...*The ancient formulations may have continuing value, they do not, on the basis of the rule theory, have doctrinal authority.*" 26. This seems to be very close to saying that the words used by the Fathers at Nicea were devoid of meaning outside a limited Christian context. Lindbeck's understanding of human language, our only means of obtaining a consensus of meaning, in fact presupposes that no consensus is obtainable. Word-concepts, within the cultural/linguistic system, are deprived of real content, they become labels conveying little information about what they label. But unless words do symbolize experiential or propositional reality, they become mere ciphers, incapable of expressing human thought forms beyond a limited cultural context. The logical conclusion of Lindbeck's thesis, it would seem, is that language would come to be seen as the strait-jacket of human thinking, rather than its tool.

Lindbeck's thesis, which gives primacy to linguistic structures, in fact severely undermines the doctrine of the Incarnation as most Christians would assert it; similar problems would be encountered with any doctrinal position, given the entailment of the cultural/linguistic system that words cease to be genuine referents to experiential or propositional reality. In fact, relying as it does on the fideistic Wittgensteinian approach to religious language, it is not easy to see the

advantages of a cultural linguistic approach to religious doctrines, or how it is claimed that this approach facilitates inter-religious dialogue.

Lindbeck states that, Christians could help the adherents of other faiths *"...to purify and enrich their heritages, to make them better speakers of the languages they have."* 27. Yet, by his own axioms, if it is impossible to "speak the language" of a religion except by adopting it as one's own, it is very difficult to see how this could be so. This aspect of Lindbeck's thesis also renders somewhat implausible, his "solution" to the question of the salvation of non-Christians. His suggestion is that non-Christians will have a post-mortem encounter with Christ, offering them the chance of salvation. 28. But in terms of the determining influence of the cultural-linguistic structure upon religious understanding, it would be impossible for the non-Christian to make a decision for or against Christ, being, as it were, excluded from the possibility of entering into the Christian paradigm. 29.

Lindbeck's thesis is of interest in that it provides an explanation of why doctrinal disagreements may occur. However, it seems to work on the presupposition of a complete inevitability in this respect. An explanation may bring about greater understanding. However, a greater understanding may not necessarily lead to a greater degree of reconciliation, but, on the contrary, may lead to the acceptance that there will inevitably be a stalemate in inter-faith dialogue. Herein lies the root of the difference between the approaches of Hick and Lindbeck to the problem of opposing religious truth claims; the difference lies in the assertion that apprehensions of religious truth are influenced by historical/cultural conditions [Hick] and the assertion that these apprehensions are constructed by historical/cultural conditions. [Lindbeck.] In the former case, there remains the possibility that the human subject may be able to acquire an awareness and understanding of the facts of historical and cultural conditioning, and therefore, through reflection, to exert judgement and freedom of will within these confines, in relation to his or her apprehensions of religious truth. This possibility seems to be excluded in the latter case. If this is so, it is very far from easy to see how inter-faith dialogue can be more easily facilitated. Ultimately, it seems that Lindbeck's thesis "falls between two stools." It purports to facilitate inter-faith dialogue, while nevertheless

adhering to strong notions of the incommensurability of faiths, through the cultural-linguistic model itself, which must seriously impede such intended dialogue. Equally, it is subject to the criticism of exclusivists, for its fideistic implications, which dilute the propositional content of Christian truth claims.

Hick rejects approaches to the problem of conflicting truth claims which are inclined to increase the "intelligibility gap" between the believer and the non-believer. He writes, in relation to a similar neo-Wittgensteinian approach to religious language adopted by D.Z. Phillips;

"...The teaching of Jesus, for example, could then no longer be seen as declaring in common language truths which are of infinite importance to mankind but which are also capable of being questioned from an agnostic or atheist standpoint." 30.

He questions the cultural/linguistic stance which in fact presupposes a radical discontinuity between the believer and the non-believer, which, literally, makes it impossible for them to speak the same language. Inter-faith dialogue cannot be facilitated, according to Hick, by an approach which treats religious language as protected discourse, for if non-cognitivists are right, it is clearly impossible for the Christian or Buddhist or Muslim to stand, as it were, outside the linguistic framework which is responsible for constructing and determining the person that he or she is. The non-believer cannot be persuaded of the value of an alternative "religious language," given the thesis that values are themselves constructed by the determinative influence of cultural linguistics. This would seem to imply the acceptance of an inevitable stalemate, in dialogue.

The Cognitive Approach to Oppositions in Religious Doctrines

Hick has consistently refused to subscribe to the Wittgensteinian "escape route" of a non-cognitive approach to religious doctrines. 31. He has maintained the view, up to the present time, that;

"...although we cannot look into the minds of the seminal religious figures of the past, or the body of believers from century

to century, within the great religious traditions, it nevertheless seems to me transparently evident that they have understood their own and one another's core language in a realist way...it seems to me abundantly clear that the core of religious language has normally been understood and is today normally understood by believers and disbelievers alike as basically cognitive. " 32.

In a very real sense, Hick claims to be a cognitivist, but a problem clearly exists for any theologian who would assert the cognitive import of religious language, given the basic fact of opposing truth claims. W.A. Christian, in an important study of the types and levels of oppositions in religious doctrines has demonstrated convincingly that doctrinal statements frequently call for assertions of cognitive belief. 33. In such instances it can be clearly shown that oppositions in religious doctrines are far from easily overcome. Christian illustrates this with reference to examples of doctrinal positions which seem, superficially, not to be opposed, because they refer to recommended courses of action within different frameworks of reference. For example, the doctrinal statement, "The New Testament teaches us to respond rightly to God," which suggests a course of action, [follow the New Testament,] is not obviously opposed to the Buddhist doctrine, "the dharma is the path to Nirvana," [follow the dharma,] since the referents are within different conceptual frameworks. It might be possible, theoretically, to follow the dharma and to follow the New Testament, unless the courses of action proposed involve the individual in obvious contradiction. But in practice, doctrines recommending personal action are interconnected within coherent schemes which also encompass doctrines which assert belief. 34. No one could, without absurdity, propose that an individual should "respond rightly to God" unless he was also asserting that God exists. It may be taken as a central truth claim, within Christianity, that a personal God exists, and that an individual, after death, may survive to be admitted to his presence. Within Theravada Buddhism it is a central truth claim that there is no God. Many other examples of conflicting truth claims of this type can be accumulated, as we have already noted in terms of Hick's own schema; the individual self either does or does not exist, the Universe either is or is not eternal. A cognitivist approach to religious doctrines cannot deny the existence of genuinely

opposing truth claims and as we have seen, Hick is very far from denying the basic fact of oppositions in religious doctrines on a phenomenological level. 35. His solution to the problem of conflicting truth claims can only be assimilated from within the context of his philosophical enterprise as a whole. This involves the following propositions which, though intrinsically interconnected, may be dealt with separately for the sake of demonstrating a cumulative argument.

1. That the philosophical distinction between the "phenomenal Real" and the "noumenal Real" [or the Real as it is "an sich"] suggests that all human responses to the Real are partial and incomplete truth assertions.
2. That such truth assertions may be cognitively true without being literally true, ie. they may be religious myths, which may nevertheless be described as "true myths" since they are based upon assertions which ultimately may be shown to be factually true. It will be my purpose to demonstrate that mythological truth is parasitic upon factual truth, but that an assertion may be cognitively true without being literally true.
3. That the possibility of cognitive truth without literal truth can be illustrated by means of the idea of eschatological verification.
4. That the truth or falsity of a doctrinal position held by a particular religious community does not necessarily invalidate the soteriological effectiveness of that religious community.

1. The Relationship between the Real "an sich" and its Personae and Impersonae

We saw in chapter 3 that Hick uses Kant's broad theme of the recognition of the part played by the cognizing set of the human mind in its perception of the environment, and applies this to the epistemology of religion in support of the pluralist hypothesis. This involves a distinction between the Real as it is in itself, the "noumenal Real" as it exists independently of our perception of it, and the "phenomenal Real" as it appears to human consciousness. 36. According to Hick, the noumenal Real can be authentically experienced as a range of both theistic and non-theistic

phenomena, "Heavenly Father," "Brahman," "Sunyata" etc. These constitute the partial and incomplete human images of the Real "an sich" which is, *"...so rich in content that it can only be finitely experienced in the various partial and inadequate ways which the history of religions describe."* 37.

There is an explicit recognition in this epistemological model, that all the concepts of God or Infinite Reality, whether conceived personally or impersonally are partial, incomplete images and that it simply is not given to human beings, in this life, to know the totality of the Real "as it is in itself," beyond human interpretation of it. The relationship between the Real "an sich" and its multiple phenomenal appearances makes possible Hick believes, mythological speech about the Real. For it is not possible, given the constraints suggested by this epistemological model of the limitation of human knowledge, for the doctrinal positions of the various religions to encapsulate absolute or literal truth.

This is not to deny that doctrines have been presented as literal truths, in the sense of theoretical truths which are capable of being verified. And it remains the case that there must in principle be true answers to such questions as "Is the Universe eternal, or did it have a beginning?" "Does the individual live only once or is he or she reincarnated after death?" But the point is that we do not at present know the answers to these questions. Despite the tendency of religious traditions to assert answers to these questions in statements of doctrine that are generally understood as statements of fact, we have no universal consensus for such knowledge. Given this reality, several alternative possibilities exist; either such statements are true or they are false or they are partially true and partially false. Hick inclines to the latter view, that they are best understood as partial, incomplete and non-theoretical truths, or true religious myths. 38.

It will be necessary, presently, to examine the idea of a "true religious myth" more closely, against the charge that it is self-contradictory, ie. a denial of the cognitive import associated with the concept of a truth claim. Firstly, however, it is necessary to deal with certain objections to Hick's

Kantian substructure which underpinned his Copernican revolution and subsequent philosophy of religious pluralism, making possible, for him, the idea of "true mythology." In 1983 it was suggested, in criticism of the Copernican Revolution, that it was unreasonable to demand this kind of revision of Christian thinking when it may turn out that a Ptolemaic Christian view of some sort is valid. 39. Hick replied to this in Problems of Religious Pluralism in terms of the very evident fact that, although any theoretical position may be valid, this should not deter us from formulating an alternative hypothesis if there seem to be good grounds for supposing that the original hypothesis [ie. a Ptolemaic Christian eschatological view] is incorrect. 40. Hick might make a similar reply to a more recent critic, P.J.Griffiths, who, in An Apology for Apologetics makes a similar point regarding what he calls Hick's "universal perspectivalism";

"...While it may indeed be the case that ultimate reality is, in and of itself, just the kind of thing that can be characterized and mediated in the way suggested [as transcending all our characterizations of it]... the prior probability of this being true seems distressingly low; some powerful collateral reasons to support it are needed." 41.

The "powerful collateral reasons" suggested, but rejected by Griffiths, that "universal perspectivalism" is desirable in that it promotes world harmony, and that the individual from one religious community frequently recognizes "good, sincere and grace filled individuals" in another, are not, I believe, the reasons Hick would use to defend the philosophical basis of his religious pluralism, much as he would affirm these statements in themselves. The validity of the philosophical and theological speculation, that each human conception of "the Real" is a partial, incomplete image, is rooted in the facts of religious pluralism and the need to account for the diversity and variability of human responses to the Real. Critics such as Almond and Griffiths seem to deny the validity of theological speculations about a question of paramount interest. Stated simply, why is it the case that we have so many diverse and seemingly incompatible human characterizations of the Real? Surely the very fact of religious pluralism calls out for some theological explanation as to why this is so. As W.Cantwell Smith has put it;

"...modern theologians have addressed the question of the appropriate attitudes of Christians to non-Christians but have given little attention to accounting for the religious diversity of mankind in the first place." 42.

A philosophical framework which attempts to account for this cannot be dismissed as a "distressingly low probability" without some alternative explanation of the religious diversity of humanity. Griffiths does not attempt to supply this. The validity of the Kantian philosophical framework lies in the fact that it conforms to human experience that our perception of entities, while inextricably linked with what those entities are, "an sich," is in fact partial and incomplete. To recall the analogy used to illustrate this in Chapter 3, if I perceive a snowflake I do not perceive it with the precision and exactitude that examination under a microscope would reveal, yet there is nevertheless a one-to-one correspondence between the snowflake viewed microscopically, and the snowflake viewed by human vision. Both are "the snowflake", the same entity. Likewise, human perception of a "silvery ball in the sky," is a very partial, incomplete and in many ways erroneous conception of the moon, but this does not alter the fact that the perception is clearly linked to the moon "an sich." As Hick has written;

"...one can say that the Real is experienced by human beings, but experienced in a manner analogous to that in which, according to Kant, we experience the world: namely, by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorial scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experience. 43.

In this way a means is provided of dealing with the fundamental philosophical question, "how is it that human beings know what they claim to know.?" A means is also provided of accounting for the variety and diversity of human religious response, a pressing and very much neglected theological issue. A profession of partial, incomplete knowledge, which is confirmed by human experience, is not a profession of unbelief, though it does imply a certain degree of agnosticism, regarding the Real "an sich," for it is an acknowledgement that all human conceptions and

perceptions of the Real are likely to fall short of that which is limitless and exceeds the scope of human conceptuality and language in this life, [but may be confirmed or disconfirmed eschatologically.] The existence of God, or Ultimate Reality, is however, a presupposition of the philosophical and theological enterprise itself, for as Hick writes;

"...We have affirmed the noumenal Real as the necessary presupposition of the religious life. Trusting in the basically veridical character of the stream of religious experience and thought in which we participate, and extending that acceptance at least to the other major streams, we have postulated the Real as the ground of this varied realm of religious phenomena. Indeed, we have already committed ourselves to such a postulate in rejecting the view of religious experience as simply human projection." 44.

Thus, he clearly distinguishes his position from that of the atheist or naturalist, who view religious thought and experience as a matter of delusion or projection; for Hick, the basic conviction is that, through a plurality of religious experience, contact with a Transcendent Reality is mediated.

A further critic of Hick's Kantian framework is Christoph Schwöbel, who writes;

"...this conception seems in danger of undermining what it sets out to preserve, that is, the plurality of religions as it is grounded in their distinctive and concrete particularity." 45.

I believe, here, Schwöbel points to the essence of the problem; there must always be some difficulty, for Christianity, in reconciling the tension between its universalist and particularist aspects. We saw in chapter 2 how unsatisfactory and one-sided are the attempts of exclusivist theologians such as Lesslie Newbigin to provide a synthesis of universalist and particularist aspects of Christianity by means of the doctrine of election, for this can only be achieved with recourse to Biblical fundamentalism. It can equally be argued, as I have done in chapter 4 that inclusivists also, while emphasising the particularity of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, have some

difficulty in explaining how this is nevertheless revelation for all humankind. However, I feel Schwöbel is unnecessarily pessimistic about the consequences for Christian particularity, of the pluralist hypothesis. It must surely be the case that the distinctive and particular nature of Christianity must always be preserved in the person of Christ as saviour, not in any doctrinal position that attempts to straitjacket this personhood within what is ultimately a human construct. As Hick has written, regarding the essence of the Christian faith;

"...Christianity is the way of life and salvation which has its origin in the Christ-event. It will continue as a way of salvation so long as men and women continue to find salvation - that is, spiritual life and health - through it." 46.

2. Cognitive Truth without Literal Truth? - Religious Doctrines as True Religious Myths

The pluralistic hypothesis holds that doctrines which support the religious life of particular communities may be conceived as true religious myths. Hick makes a distinction between these and literal truths which are true for everyone. 47. However, this need not entail that all cognitive import is removed from religious myths, for as we saw in the section entitled "Mythological Language," at the beginning of chapter 4, Hick holds that true myths are embedded in a context of genuinely factual belief. The profound level of truth they contain is dependent on a connection with objective reality, for;

"...Such myths are distinguished from whimsical or arbitrary exercises of the poetic imagination by their relation to a framework of factual belief which they supplement and adorn ...what might be called valuable or significant myth is necessarily parasitic upon non-mythological beliefs." 48.

Hick, as we have noted, would wish to affirm the cognitive status of [some] religious truth assertions; for him, an assertion is cognitive in nature if it meets certain criteria of empirical verifiability and if, at least in principle, it is possible to outline the circumstances in which such

an assertion could be shown to be true or false. It is important to stress however, that while he affirms the factual character of some religious assertions, he nevertheless allows ample scope for non-cognitive religious discourse. There is, he believes, a complex admixture of both cognitive and non-cognitive elements.

"...It is vitally important to maintain the genuinely factual character of the central affirmations of the Christian faith...given a basic structure of factual belief, there is ample scope for the nonfactual language of myth, symbol and poetry to express the believer's awareness of the illimitable mysteries which surround that core of religious fact." 49.

Thus, within this schema, which makes a distinction between cognitive /non-cognitive assertions, but which outlines the interrelationship between them, Hick could assert [cognitively] that Jesus was so fully God's agent and mediator that, through him, one may come to know God and his salvation, and that this statement is capable of being verified in post-mortem experience. Equally, he could assert [non-cognitively "per se" but based upon cognitive fact,] the truth of the religious myth, that Jesus is the Son of God. Hick seems to want to say that a religious assertion can be cognitively true, [or at least dependent on a cognitive truth] without being literally true. Is this possible, or is it a contradiction in terms?

Hick has recently clarified this point in response to Loughlin's statement that *"...neither myth nor metaphor has cognitive content."* 50.

According to Hick, this is a misunderstanding, and it is worth quoting him at some length on this important point.

"...For an utterance to have cognitive content is, I take it, for it to be true or false. It is clearly possible to make true and false metaphorical statements [for example, "Hitler was a demon" and "Hitler was an angel"]; and to make true and false mythological statements [for instance, "Jesus was God incarnate" and "Hitler was God incarnate."] I have argued that the doctrine of the

incarnation is metaphorically or mythologically true, although lacking in any precise literal content...I regard the incarnational myth as...one that is capable of being spelled out non-mythologically. Its non-mythological meaning is something like this: that Jesus was so open and obedient to God that God was able to act through him in relation to those whom Jesus encountered. Jesus could have said what the Theologia Germanica [ch.10] tell us that all Christians should learn to say: "I would fain be to the eternal Goodness what his right hand is to a man." This, in my view, is the concrete meaning of the statement that God was incarnate in Jesus." 51.

Hick must be right in drawing attention to Loughlin's mistake in asserting that neither myth nor metaphor has cognitive content. This mistake can be illustrated by means of a very simple example. The very simple metaphorical idea, "it's raining cats and dogs" would convey, to most English people, the idea of heavy rain. They would certainly not expect to look out of the window and see cats and dogs, but equally, they would not expect to see clear skies and brilliant sunshine. The incidence of heavy rain would, however, confirm the metaphor as being cognitively true. Clearly, Hick is correct in denying the criticism that metaphorical or mythological truth is devoid of cognitive content.

The idea of cognitive truth without literal truth could be further illustrated in the following way. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that cognition involves knowledge; statements of doctrine involve the claim that something is known, although the truth or falsity of the knowledge expressed in a statement of doctrine may not be capable of being verified or falsified here and now. It remains the case, nonetheless, that a propositional view of truth is implicit in the formulation of statements of doctrine. But would the cognitive content of a doctrine of the salvation of Christ be radically altered if a distinction was made between a mythic and a literal expression of the proposition that he was Incarnate of God? The mythic/literal distinction might

lead us to express the doctrine of the Incarnation, linked with a doctrine of salvation, in the following different ways:

1. The mythological idea of an Incarnate Son of God expresses my knowledge of salvation through Christ.

2. I know salvation can be obtained through Christ because he was, uniquely and ontologically, the Incarnate Son of God.

In the first statement, the link between knowledge and salvation is Christ, independent of his ontological status as Son of God. In the second statement, it is immediately apparent that the salvific nature of Christ is intrinsically linked with, and dependent upon, his ontological status as Son of God. But it does not seem to me that the cognitive content [ie. the knowledge expressed] is greatly altered, at least, not in terms of the idea of salvation. And as we shall see in the final section, it is the soteriological effectiveness of religions, not their doctrinal structures, which Hick believes is of ultimate importance, for,

"...such beliefs concerning matters of trans-historical fact vary in importance within the belief-system to which they belong; at the top end of the scale they may be indispensable to a given doctrinal structure. It does not however follow that structure is itself indispensable for salvation/liberation." 52.

What seems to me to be necessary, however, before we reach the point of affirming, with Hick, the possibility of cognitive truth without literal truth, is to examine further the idea of cognitive truth without literal truth by means of Hick's notion of eschatological verification.

3. Eschatological Verification: a "test case" for the idea of Cognitive Truth without Literal Truth

It is Hick's belief that the cognitive status of religious language is dependent on there being, ultimately, a means of verifying the truth content of statements made about God /Ultimate Reality.

A positive theology of death is, for him, a necessary adjunct of his entire theological enterprise,

for he takes very seriously the attack of logical positivists, whose fundamental assertion is that talk about God is cognitively meaningless, for the affirmation "that God exists" seems to make no experienceable difference to human life. 53. Hick is in agreement with the basic empiricist position that "to exist is to make a difference," 54. Therefore he does not retreat into a non-cognitive approach to religious language, [Braithwaite, Cupitt,] for he believes that the question posed by the empiricist challenge - what experienceable difference does it make that God exists? - is a perfectly legitimate question requiring a literal answer. The answer, he believes, lies in the notion of eschatological verification; experienceable confirmation of the religious character of human existence will be beyond this earthly life, in the eschaton. 55.

The notion of eschatological verification is not to be viewed, according to Hick, as a "last ditch" attempt to meet the challenge of contemporary scepticism, but is a drawing out of the logical implications of the traditional Christian teaching of a "life everlasting," and a necessary corollary of faith in the teaching of Christ himself. In God and the Universe of Faiths he asserts that there would be something very strange in an individual's committing himself to Christ as a revelation of God's love to men and women, while rejecting so fundamental a part of his teaching as commitment to the existence of an afterlife, and that no New Testament scholar denies that this was an integral part of Jesus' conception of God's purpose for human beings. 56. Further, in Problems of Religious Pluralism;

"...the life everlasting is in my view one of the essential claims by which Christian theism stands or falls; and that there are such cruxes is of course the nub of the theistic response to the verification / falsification challenge." 57.

It is immediately apparent that Hick's references to Christian theism are potentially problematic vis a vis a pluralist hypothesis: while traditional Christian theism certainly asserts the survival of personal, individual consciousness, other faiths, including Theravada Buddhism and certain strands of monistic Hinduism make no such assertions, but on the contrary, deny notions of individual survival beyond death, and uphold beliefs which are unacceptable to Christianity. For example,

the Advaitin view that the collective human self is ultimately identical with God is clearly opposed to the notion of the survival of individual consciousness, to be admitted to God's Heavenly presence, within Christianity. It has been suggested that this constitutes a fatal flaw in the pluralist hypothesis, and, further, that Hick's concept of eschatological verification, together with his defence of the cognitive status of religious language, involve him in a profound contradiction. 58. It would appear to be the case that, ultimately, one rather than another religious prediction of afterlife existence will conform more nearly to the truth that is apparently to be verified in the eschaton, if the demands of cognition in relation to religious language are to be met. If the status of afterlife affirmations is that they are held to be literally true, Hick does seem to be pushed into a position in which, by defending the cognitive status of religious language, while promoting the theory of eschatological verification, he is in a position of self-contradiction. Hick cannot assert that all human conceptions of afterlife existence are equally and literally true and valid [in defence of pluralism] and assert the principle of eschatological verification [in defence of the cognitive status of religious language] without contradiction.

If, however, the status of after-life affirmations is that they are mythologically true, this may allow Hick to maintain an open-ended view of the final eschatological state, while the demands of cognition are met by the affirmation that there will be, beyond death, an afterlife in some form which is capable of being perceived and experienced by human consciousness, ie. is in principle capable of being verified. In the last analysis, I shall argue, the naturalistic option is refuted, and the demands of cognition are met, by just such a notion of eschatological verification, with the proviso that after-life affirmations should be viewed as true religious myths. My purpose is two-fold; firstly to attempt to demonstrate that Hick's theology of death, while it has certainly undergone considerable modification in the course of his career, particularly with respect to the theory of eschatological verification, remains internally coherent and compatible with a pluralist theology of religions. Secondly, I shall attempt to show that the theory of eschatological verification can be used to illustrate the viability of the idea of cognitive truth without literal truth. If doctrinal affirmations of after-life beliefs are viewed as true or false religious myths which are

in principle subject to confirmation in after-life existence, they are capable of satisfying the demands of cognition, despite the fact that it must be acknowledged that such confirmation or disconfirmation cannot take place in this life. To achieve this, it is necessary to examine Hick's afterlife beliefs in some detail.

In Death and Eternal Life 1976, Hick made suggestions regarding what possible pareschatological and eschatological "scenarios" might be like. He stresses that theological speculations regarding afterlife existence can only be tentative, for we are moving from the sphere of the known to the unknown. 59. All that we can do is employ the use of reason to criticize the various theologies of death developed by the great faiths, from the basis of some general theological and philosophical conception of human nature and the place of men and women in the Universe. Hick bases his views on the premise that life is a soul or person-making process, the "telos" or purpose of this life is to transcend ego-centredness and to attain a state of human perfection: life is a movement towards this goal. 60. He consistently emphasizes, however, in this work and in several other publications, that it is a perceivable fact that very few individuals succeed in attaining this goal; those who do are known by the great faiths as saints, bodhisattvas, jivas. Others make some progress through their varied life experiences towards moral and spiritual perfection, but many others, often through no fault of their own, fail to develop to any great extent what is their essential human potential. 61.

It is because of Hick's conviction that God's loving purpose for humanity is only very partially and imperfectly fulfilled in this life that he affirms the necessity of a pareschatological state. His theology of death encompasses a number of strands of thinking; it is based on a philosophical conception of humanity and its place in the Universe, and draws on essential Christian belief in the existence of an afterlife, deriving from Christ's teaching, but draws also on the insights of those religions which affirm an intermediate state or states, between this life and the end of our temporal existence, particularly the wisdom of the "Bardo Thodol." 62. In this last respect Hick's theology of death differs considerably from traditional Christian views that the fate of the

individual is decided at the time of death. He speculates that this life may be one of a series of limited phases of existence, each ending in its own "death," which gives shape and coherence to finite human existence, for death, he believes, is an essential boundary without which individuality could scarcely be conceived to exist. 63. The essential purpose of each existence, however, remains unchanged; the individual progresses, slowly or rapidly, towards that state of ego-transcendence which allows him or her to become, "*more and more a person and less and less an ego.*" 64. Hick does not believe, however, that in the eschaton, or final state of affairs, there will be a total absorption of human individuality into the godhead, in accordance with the monistic atman=brahman philosophy. Ego transcendence is not envisaged as the annihilation of human individuality, for in the eschaton;

"...the individual's series of lives culminates eventually in a last life beyond which there is no further embodiment but instead entry into the common Vision of God, or the eternal consciousness of the atman in its relation to Ultimate Reality." 65.

In this respect Hick's theology of death conforms more closely with the dualistic beliefs of Christianity and other theistic faiths, than with the beliefs of the great faiths of Indian origin.

To summarize Hick's position as expressed in Death and Eternal Life it would seem that he affirms, unequivocally, the existence of a life after death in some form which is only loosely specified, but is based on a philosophical conception of the nature of this present existence in relation to God's loving purpose for humanity. However, it is undeniable that his position in relation to eschatological verification has been modified considerably in the course of his career, both before and since this publication. In God and the Universe of Faiths he asserts that we cannot resort to agnosticism regarding the nature of afterlife, simply declaring that in some unimaginable way God's loving purpose for humanity will be fulfilled. 66. Words such as "the sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life," relate unambiguously to a belief in the continued existence of the individual after bodily death; according to Hick to suggest otherwise is to use language "irresponsibly and meaninglessly," ie. non-cognitively. In Death and Eternal Life, while

emphasizing that the nature of afterlife is a matter of theological speculation, he ultimately aligns himself more closely with Christian belief in personal, individual survival beyond death, than with the beliefs of monistic faiths. 67. In Problems of Religious Pluralism however, he argues for an open-ended eschatology, and toleration of eschatological uncertainty;

"...it seems likely that the different expectations cherished within the different traditions will ultimately turn out to be partly correct and partly incorrect...it may well be that the final state will prove to be beyond the horizon of our present powers of imagination."

68.

In his latest major work, An Interpretation of Religion, 1989, he states that the pluralist hypothesis does not have to commit itself to any one particular prediction of the eschaton. The pluralist hypothesis as it has now evolved affirms that eschatological mythologies may serve to evoke in us a right expectation to the limitless good of ultimate human destiny without any of them being fully adequate, or more adequate than another. 69. The sticking point of the principle of eschatological verification is not, it would now seem, that one human conception of the eschaton should be more adequate, or nearer to the truth than another, but that, ultimately, a religious, rather than a naturalistic interpretation of the Universe should be capable of being verified in a future which may well be beyond the range of human imagination and conception. There is no denying that, in adopting this position, Hick is implicitly if not explicitly rejecting the stance he adopted in God and the Universe of Faiths and in Death and Eternal Life.

Hick, it would seem, is now prepared to accept a considerably greater degree of agnosticism in relation to afterlife beliefs than would have been the case earlier in his career. The examination of his own theology of death reveals that he is in fact arguing for considerable revision of traditional Christian doctrines [although, he is in fact more "traditional" in this respect than several contemporary theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, who affirm the doctrine of Incarnation while adopting theologies of death which are in some cases very far removed from realist conceptions of after-life belief in any sense.] 70. But the questions which concern us at present

centre upon the issue of the internal coherence of Hick's own theology of death. Is it possible for Hick to maintain his defence of the cognitive status of religious language, via the principle of eschatological verification, while adopting an approach to the nature of afterlife existence which now rests upon agnostic presuppositions? In doing so, is he not adopting a stance which is self-contradictory? The question has been formulated in the following way, in relation to Hick's affirmations regarding the afterlife, as expressed in Death and Eternal Life:

"...how can [Hick] claim that these non-theistic faiths as they now exist are equally salvific and equally true in their beliefs and experience? Are they salvific despite their beliefs and experience?"

71.

The answer to this last question must I believe be a qualified "yes," but it involves making two distinctions, firstly between literal truth and metaphorical truth, and secondly between truth and salvation. Clearly, it cannot be the case that eschatological predictions are equally true [or true at all] if the demands of cognition in relation to religious language are to be satisfied, if they are regarded as literal truths, for they can and do contradict one other. The individual who makes the statement, "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come," is clearly stating something he or she believes to be true of life beyond this earthly existence. In using this language literally, he or she is making a statement which is believed to be true. And, ultimately, the statement must be true or untrue, the dead either will or will not be resurrected. But if such a statement is regarded as a mythological truth, ie. an affirmation of some future existence beyond death, the precise nature of which is unknown and unknowable in this present existence, but such that it is capable of being confirmed in the after-life, then I suggest that this would be a case which illustrates the fact that mythological language is capable of meeting the demands of cognitive truth, without being literally true. How might this work in practice? Any suggestions can of course only be purely speculative, for, as Hick emphasises, this is a realm that is totally beyond present human experience. 72. But certain conditions, presumably, continued consciousness and memory of past beliefs, would have to be present, in order that after-life experience should meet the requirements of the verification principle. Purely speculatively, therefore, I would contend that if, beyond death,

instead of finding oneself in the company of saints in the Heavenly Kingdom, or confronted with the beatific vision of God, one found oneself [whether embodied or disembodied] in the presence of, or absorbed into, the divine reality in such a way as to be beyond doubt, while conscious of past memories of the ways in which this experience differed from previous anticipations, then this would constitute a case in which one's previous religious convictions would be confirmed as being cognitively true without being literally true.

It is Hick's present belief that afterlife beliefs are best interpreted in this way, and that;

"...our pluralist hypothesis holds that whilst such beliefs may in a particular phase of history be mythologically true for the particular group whose religious life they support, they do not have the literal truth that would constitute them true for everyone." 73.

This does not entail a denial of the cognitive content of mythological truth claims, rather, it is an illustration of the idea that the principle of eschatological verification can be utilized to substantiate the idea of cognitive truth without literal truth.

Secondly, it is arguable that salvation need not be dependent on the truth or falsity of statements of after-life belief. Hick believes that faiths themselves, as paths by which the individual progresses, in his terminology, from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, may be salvific, despite the truth or falsity of their eschatological predictions. Why should it be the case that salvation is dependent on the truth or falsity of eschatological doctrines which cannot be verified or falsified in this life? Eschatological guesswork, I would suggest, with Hick, is a poor determinant of soteriological effectiveness. 74. If he is correct, it seems to be consistent with a viable pluralist hypothesis for Hick to maintain an open-ended view of the final eschatological state, while the demands of cognition are met, via the principle of eschatological verification, that there will be, beyond death, an afterlife in some form which is capable of being perceived and experienced by human consciousness. What remains to be examined, however, is the final aspect

of Hick's thesis in relation to the problem of conflicting truth claims, that the truth or falsity of a particular tradition's doctrinal affirmations - whether in relation to the afterlife or otherwise - need not invalidate the soteriological effectiveness of that particular faith community.

4. The Soteriological Efficacy of Religious Faiths

To sum up so far, it seems that Hick takes the stance that religions do make truth claims, and that these are cognitive truth claims, although some of them are best understood as true or false religious myths, within a philosophical structure which presupposes that all human truth claims are partial and incomplete. The cognitive status of such truth claims is in principle capable of being confirmed in after life experience, through the idea of eschatological verification. He holds the belief that religious doctrines have cognitive status because he believes this is how they actually function within world faiths. It is Hick's contention that the religious language employed to express doctrinal truth claims is the kind of language used to express truth content, not merely to express a way of feeling, or a decision to behave in a particular way. 75. To say other than this, is in Hick's view, to deny the intent of the religious believer in his or her use of language. In the case of Christianity, "...*Christian language, in the actual speech of a living community, presupposes the extra-linguistic reality of God.*" 76. However, he is also saying that the truth or falsity of religious doctrines is not of ultimate importance. Doctrines constitute the humanly conditioned "lenses" through which Ultimate Reality is partially perceived, but they are simply human constructs and as such, cannot encapsulate absolute and complete truth. It is to be trusted that they help and support the individual believer in his or her progress towards salvation/liberation, but they can only serve as a means to an end. They do not themselves constitute a religious purpose. The religious purpose of salvation, liberation or enlightenment is not dependent on the truth or falsity of doctrinal claims which we have no means of verifying or falsifying in this life, for; "...*it seems implausible that our final destiny should depend on our professing beliefs about matters of trans-historical fact concerning which we have no definitive information.*" 77.

It is Hick's belief that the common factor among world religions is their soteriological structure, and that they should be judged according to their efficacy in promoting the spiritual and moral development of the individual;

"...the basic criterion [for judging religions] is the extent to which they promote or hinder the great religious aim of salvation/liberation, that limitlessly better quality of human existence which comes about from a transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness." 78.

It is Hick's present belief, outlined in An Interpretation of Religion that, as far as human judgement is able to discern, each tradition is in fact more or less equally effective in bringing about such a transformation. 79. This view has, however, been criticized by P.J.Griffiths in An Apology for Apologetics who suggests that Hick's criterion for judging world faiths is inadequate and that, in reality, what he calls "Universalist Perspectivalists" are pushed into the position of acknowledging the equivalence of all doctrinal positions, for they deny the need for discrimination between desirable and undesirable doctrinal positions. He writes;

"...some religious communities, apparently, constitute an effective context for the salvific transformation of their adherents, while others do not. But we are never told how to distinguish the former from the latter, nor what arguments may be brought to bear in support of the distinction we must make." 80.

In fact, Hick has frequently acknowledged the need for critical discrimination in the assessment of doctrines in world faiths and other quasi-religious movements; *"...to say that whatever is sincerely believed and practised is, by definition, true, would be the end of all critical discrimination, both intellectual and moral."* 81. More recently, he has suggested, *"...the possibility of a systematic moral criticism, within each tradition, of its own inherited doctrines."* 82.

He believes the pluralistic hypothesis points to this possibility, but does not develop it to any great extent. Griffiths acknowledges that Hick employs a certain criterion for judging the efficacy of

religions as salvific contexts - that they should be seen to be bringing about the transformation in their adherents, from ego-centredness to Reality or God-centredness - but believes that, *"if it is a formal criterion then it cannot do the work it is intended to do."* 83. However, Griffiths uses a rather inappropriate example to illustrate this conviction. He writes;

"...observably, a sincere and devoted member of the S.S. or Jonestown community is often capable of actions that appear, dramatically, not to be ego-centred - even to the point of self-sacrificial death. What distinguishes the self-sacrificial death of a stormtrooper in the service of the thousand-year Reich from that of a Christian martyr on the cross? Clearly, not the degree to which the egocentricity of each has been transformed into reality-centredness; rather, it is the radical difference in the way in which reality is conceived by each." 84.

Griffiths is surely right to point out that a Nazi stormtrooper would have beliefs, values and conceptions of reality entirely at variance with those of a Christian martyr. What is questionable is whether Hick, or anyone else, would accept that these examples necessarily constitute clear cases of transformation from ego-centredness. On the contrary, self-sacrificial death could easily be considered an exceptionally egocentric action, depending on the circumstances and motivations of the individual in question. Does this mean Griffiths is correct in suggesting that it is impossible to judge the transformation of the individual from ego-centredness by his or her actions, and that it is by doctrinal beliefs and truth claims that we must be guided? No, since he chooses the very odd example of self-sacrificial death as an action which might denote the transformation of the individual from self-centredness, an example which would be in itself open to much dispute. In reality, he undermines his argument by illustrating it in this way. Hick has rightly pointed out that the shift from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is capable of expression in diverse forms of life. 85. He would claim, for example, that it is discernible in the lives of Gandhi, and Mother Theresa, but through universal perception of their selfless devotion and compassion to others, rather than through the dubious example of self-sacrificial death. In such cases, it would not be

at all easy for Griffiths to dispute the widespread respect for such individuals, and recognition of their "saintliness", which must be based on upon a consensus regarding their ego-denying actions, rather than upon the beliefs held by each, for, as Griffiths would concede, there would be undeniable differences in the way each conceived reality. Griffiths criticisms do, however, highlight the need to examine the concept of soteriology in more detail; what, precisely, does Hick mean by it, and how is it to be discerned and evaluated? Hick's pluralism, as we have seen, relies heavily upon the idea that there is a common religious concern among world faiths, that each seek the salvation or liberation or enlightenment of the individual and that thus, a common soteriological structure may be discerned. The soteriological effectiveness of religious communities is, he believes, of greater importance than the truth or falsity of doctrinal positions held by them. However, as we have seen, some theologians, including Lindbeck, have suggested that there is no common experiential core to be discerned among the world faiths, and this would seem to imply structural diversity rather than common ground. Even if there is similarity in soteriological structure, how we must then ask, is the soteriological effectiveness of the various world faiths to be discerned and evaluated?

The Idea of Soteriology Examined

It is Hick's belief that the comparison of religions, in any sense, would be impossible if they did not exhibit a common structure. 86. This common structure is soteriological in a broad sense, in that it provides a means of transition from the present, unsatisfactory state of the human condition, to an infinitely better one, beginning in this life and proceeding to an unimaginably better in the future, as an eschatological vision. 87. This view, although emphasized to a greater extent in Problems of Religious Pluralism and An Interpretation of Religion, is implicit in God and the Universe of Faiths, where Hick states;

"...I have been suggesting that Christianity is a way of salvation, which, beginning some two thousand years ago, has become the principal way of salvation in three continents. The other great

faiths are likewise ways of salvation, providing the principal path to the divine reality for other large sections of humanity." 88.

Hick, as we have noted, now defines salvation or liberation as,

"...the realisation of that limitlessly better quality of human existence which comes about in the transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness," 89.

He believes that religions have more or less value according to whether they promote or hinder this fundamental aim. 90.

It will be helpful, at this point to examine the notion of "being transformed from self-centredness to Reality-centredness" in more detail, before accepting it at face value, for it seems to be a form of words which is in need of further definition. What transformation, precisely, does the individual undergo, and how do we know that it is taking place? Further, in speaking of "Reality-centredness," is Hick postulating an underlying reality for all religions, which would be subject to the criticism noted at the beginning of this chapter, that such a view seriously disregards the real differences among religions?

Hick has, I believe, given content to the idea of individual human transformation from self-centredness, in that it is an observable feature in the lives of those believers who, through their religious visions of reality, acquire the virtues of goodwill, loving kindness and compassion towards others, to a marked extent. It is a referent to those;

"...in whom the signs of salvation or liberation are strikingly visible and who are accordingly known as bodhisattvas, gurus, mahatmas, masters, saints...This is of course a stipulative definition - as is any other proposal for the use of the term. But it connects the broad hypothesis being developed...with the worldwide phenomenon of spiritually impressive individuals whose lives are predominantly centred in some manifestation of the Real." 91.

Hick is, I believe, postulating an underlying reality "an sich" for all religions, but it is important to note that, while he does seem to be claiming that all religions are related to this reality, this does not necessarily imply that each individual believer experiences the same reality. Clearly, individuals do not do so; the Christian, in experiencing an awareness of God, would strongly deny that this was an experience of Emptiness [sunyata] in Buddhist terms. Hick has made this point explicit in reply to a criticism by Cobb, who, in his concern to do justice to what he perceives as the clear differences in the conceptual images and soteriological aims of the religious traditions, has written;

"...Why not allow, at least as a working hypothesis, that what is named as "Yahweh" and "the Father of Christ", is not the same as what is named as "Emptiness"? Such a hypothesis would not imply that one is real and the other is not. Quite the contrary, it could mean that each has just the reality and character attributed to it by those who are recognized authorities in the two traditions. We could acknowledge that both are transcendent in very important ways without identifying them." 92.

Hick has, however, made it clear that he has no wish to identify the concepts of God and sunyata, or any other religious concepts that are clearly so far from being the same. He is in agreement with Cobb that these concepts are not identical, but, he believes, constitute different "lenses" through which the Ultimately Real is humanly experienced. He believes that;

"...religious experiencing of life can itself take different forms. The world may be experienced as God's handiwork, or as the battlefield of good and evil, or as the cosmic dance of Shiva...These are different forms of religious experiencing-as."
93.

In this way, he draws upon the epistemological doctrine of knowledge he first developed in Faith and Knowledge, that religious faith is to be regarded, as is all experience, as interpretation. 94. In addition to this insight, however, is the conviction that each humanly interpreted experience is

related to the same Ultimate Reality. If we can accept the Kantian distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal real, which, as I have argued, conforms to human experience that our perceptions of entities are different from but intrinsically related to what those entities are in themselves, then I believe we can accept these two aspects of Hick's religious pluralism as complementary, for, this hypothesis allows us to make sense of the fact of religious diversity. According to Hick, we are able to recognize the soteriological function of the great world faiths primarily through an innate human awareness of moral value, which, as we saw at the beginning of this thesis, is subscribed to by Hick as inclining us to a religious rather than a naturalistic interpretation of the Universe, [without actually refuting the naturalistic hypothesis.] 95. This innate human capacity allows us to make moral judgements. Though moral codes are culturally variable, there does, according to Hick, seem to be an innate human capacity to distinguish between beliefs and actions which are morally harmful to the individual and to others, and those which are morally beneficial. 96. The actual founding of a religious faith, frequently in opposition to the prevailing moral and ethical codes of the time, is dependent on there being some great religious leader, usually named, but in the case of Hinduism, unnamed, whose teaching is perceived by others to be superior to generally accepted codes. In addition, people have found through the experience of living in accordance with such teaching, that it is indeed the case that God, or Absolute Reality, however conceived, is mediated to them by means of the faith. 97. Hick believes that, in their times, each of the great religious teachers was motivated by dissatisfaction with prevailing beliefs and practices, thus, their religious concerns were ultimately soteriological, and here we find common ground. 98. By these statements, Hick clarifies his view that the primary function of religion is soteriological, and that, in a variety of ways, each tradition facilitates the salvation or liberation or enlightenment of the individual adherent.

Discerning Soteriological Effectiveness: Some Possible Objections

It would seem, from this analysis, that the soteriological effectiveness of faiths is to be discerned and evaluated "by the fruits of the spirit," ie. the adherents of a particular faith ought to be seen

to be more advanced in their transition from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, than their non-religious contemporaries. Several problems arise, in relation to this conclusion. Firstly, subjective human judgements seem to be involved in making any kind of evaluation of heightened moral awareness. Secondly, human judgement in such matters is inevitably subject to human bias; we may be disinclined to perceive "saintliness" in other traditions, by virtue of loyalty to the creeds and practices of our own faith. The limitation and subjectivity of human judgements regarding the soteriological effectiveness of world faiths is fully acknowledged by Hick. He states that although in principle it ought to be possible to assess and grade religious phenomena, we cannot assess and grade the great religious faiths as totalities.

"...For each of these long traditions is so internally diverse, containing so many different kinds of both good and evil that it is impossible for human judgement to weigh up and compare their merits as systems of salvation. It may be that one facilitates human liberation/salvation more than others, but if this is so it is not evident to human vision. So far as we can tell, they are equally productive of that transition from self to Reality which we see in the saints of all traditions." 99.

According to Hick, we are able to recognize and respect particular individuals throughout the ages, who are known as bodhisattvas, gurus, mahatmas, masters, saints. 100. This is because the "fruits of the spirit" are universally recognisable. However, we are unable to assess in any precise way the religious systems which have produced such people, because of the internal complexity and diversity of these systems and because of the limitation in human judgement, which is often distorted by credal and communal loyalty, usually to the tradition of our birth. However, implicit in what Hick is saying is the fact that "saintliness" is a generic term, since it is observable as a phenomenon throughout the religions. We seem to be in a position of being able to recognize "saintliness" but of being unable to define the conditions which produce it. However, surely a common effect presupposes some degree of common cause; it ought in principle to be possible to

formulate objective criteria for the self-examination of the beliefs and practices of the world faiths, and Hick suggests this but does not develop the idea. 101.

Although Hick has not developed, to any great extent, proposals for evaluating the soteriological effectiveness of world faiths, he has, I believe, built up a formidable argument for the existence of a soteriological structure common to them. Soteriology, in its broadest sense, is a common human concern, and one that seems to have been of primary importance in the founding of world faiths. The universal phenomena of "sainthood" is an observable although immeasurable product of the function of world faiths, in bringing about a heightened spiritual and moral awareness in certain persons, which is recognisable by ordinary individuals in their own experience. It is soteriology that makes possible some kind of comparison between world faiths, for it is an area of "common ground."

Despite these arguments, however, some theologians object to the idea of there being a common soteriological structure discernible in world faiths, on the grounds that the various notions of "salvation," "liberation" and "enlightenment" as used within the world faiths, do not mean the same thing and therefore cannot be used interchangeably. It is, for example, Pannenberg's belief that;

"...unfortunately the notion of salvation as presently available in terms of experiential transformation does not square with the biblical evidence. It has no basis in the New Testament usage of the term." 102.

Pannenberg seems to believe that the concept of salvation as experiential human transformation is inconsistent with the biblical usage and that a specific Christian concept cannot be compared with apparently similar concepts which are used within other world faiths. He believes "salvation" must be used solely and exclusively to express the idea of the immanence of God's Kingdom, citing Luke 11:20. to illustrate this. 103. But while it is true to say that generally in the Synoptic Gospels, the idea of salvation is intrinsically linked with the activity of Christ himself and the

coming of the Kingdom of God, it is also undeniable that certain aspects of Jesus' response to the questions, "...*what must I do to receive eternal life?*" [Matthew 19.16. Mark 10.17. Luke 18.18.] and, "*who, then, can be saved?*" [Matthew 19.25. Mark 10.26. Luke 18.26.] point clearly to human choice and human responsibility as intrinsic to the salvific process. This is what Hick would want to describe as the transformation from self-centredness to Reality or God-centredness, which takes place in human beings through the various phenomenal religions.

Some other theologians, including Rahner, recognize that, distinct from a specifically biblical usage, salvific concern is a genuine human existent, a human preoccupation that arises from the orientation of men and women towards God. He writes in terms of what he calls a "searching Christology";

"...In freedom and orientation towards definitiveness, man is concerned with himself as a single whole. He should allow the whole and singleness of his existence to appear before him and be answerable for this in freedom. He should, in other words, be concerned for himself and for his "salvation." 104.

While Rahner would hold that salvation is obtainable solely [although inclusively] through Christ, he allows a conceptual understanding of salvation that is anthropologically orientated. Pannenberg, however, seems to want to locate the concept of salvation so firmly within a structure of biblical texts confined to Christianity, that, by definition, no comparison can be made between Christian salvation, and "liberation" or "enlightenment" as understood within other faiths. But, if he is making the point, against Hick, that religions are not alike, and that they do not share a common soteriological structure, this surely cannot be done simply with recourse to the biblical usage of the term; more powerful collateral reasons are needed, and Pannenberg does not supply these.

It is interesting to note that John B. Cobb, another contributor to the same volume of essays in opposition to religious pluralism, who would agree with Pannenberg that there is more diversity than common ground to be discerned in a comparison of world faiths, nevertheless believes that

comparing and finding arguments for and against conflicting religious doctrines is an unproductive exercise;

"...laying out the conflicting doctrines and developing arguments for and against each is a questionable preoccupation. Instead, it is best to listen to the deep, even ultimate, concerns that are being expressed in these diverse statements." 105.

According to Cobb, when these religious concerns are analyzed, we may find that even clearly contradictory doctrinal statements can to some extent be reconciled. He illustrates this with reference to the Buddhist denial of the existence of God, and the Christian affirmation of his existence. The Buddhist denial is an expression of the insight that attachment blocks the way to enlightenment, while the Christian affirmation is an expression of belief in a Being worthy of trust. But this need not be "attachment" in the Buddhist sense. Cobb concedes that a greater understanding of the central concerns of other world faiths does not eradicate the basic fact of oppositions in religious doctrines, but what is interesting is his illustration of the results of a change of preoccupation and emphasis. When we abandon preoccupation with conflicting doctrines and turn instead to religious concerns, we are immediately led back to soteriology. Implicit in Cobb's insights is a recognition of the common religious purpose and concern for the ultimate destiny and salvation of humankind. This recognition is shared by other theologians who would be in agreement with Hick's belief that religions share a common soteriological structure. 106.

Conclusion

The question of soteriology and related issues concerning the commonality and diversity of religions are indeed difficult theological matters which are the subject of much current debate. In this chapter I have argued, with Hick that the basic fact of oppositions in religious doctrines does not necessarily constitute a barrier to the pluralist hypothesis. The Kantian philosophical framework provides a way of asserting the partial, incomplete nature of humanly constructed religious truths, that, being less than absolute and complete truths, can justifiably and appropriately be described as true [or false] religious myths. These may be cognitively true without being literally true, and the idea of eschatological verification could in principle be capable of demonstrating this. Further, the truth or falsity of the doctrinal positions held need not invalidate the soteriological effectiveness of the great world faiths. However, it will be necessary to revisit some of these issues in the next chapter, in the context of a search for shared ethical criteria among the religious traditions, for in this sphere the charge is that pluralists such as Hick tend to sublate the distinctive soteriological doctrines of other faiths, and, illegitimately, attempt to accommodate them under the Christian "umbrella" of "salvation", in an attempt to discern a spurious commonality. Our enquiry in the next chapter will centre upon the question of how far it is in fact true to say that the religions share "common ground", towards the establishment of a viable theory of common ethical concerns among the faiths.

CHAPTER 5 NOTES.

1. This view is shared by a number of exclusivist and inclusivist theologians; see G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. pp.41-46, also, H.Netland. Dissonant Voices -Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth. Michigan. Eerdmanns. Leicester. Apollos. 1991. ch.6. J.A. Dinoia. The Diversity of Religions. A Christian Perspective. Washington. D.C. Catholic University of America Press. 1992. chs. 2 & 3.
2. J. Hick. God Has Many Names. Philadelphia. Westminster. 1982. pp.83, 11.
3. This assertion is most explicitly stated by W.Cantwell Smith in his essay, "Idolatry," in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. London. S.C.M. 1988. pp.60-61, though it is implicit in Hick's theology, when he states,

"...When I meet a devout Jew, or Muslim, or Sikh, or Hindu, or Buddhist in whom the fruits of openness to the divine are gloriously evident, I cannot realistically regard the Christian experience of the divine as authentic and their non-Christian experience as unauthentic." *"On Conflicting Truth Claims,"*
Problems of Religious Pluralism. London. Macmillan. 1985. p.91.
4. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.88-91. Also, An Interpretation of Religion. London. Macmillan.1989. pp.363-376.
5. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.365. Also, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.89 .
6. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.371.
7. *ibid.* p.367.
8. This analysis of the levels of doctrinal disagreement is in agreement with the typology of W.A.Christian. Oppositions of Religious Doctrines. London. Macmillan. 1972.
9. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.95.
10. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion.p.369.
11. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.14. Also, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.91.
12. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.369-370.

13. G.A.Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine - Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age.
London. S.P.C.K. 1984.
14. ibid. pp.31-42.
15. ibid. p.16.
16. ibid. p.34.
17. ibid. p.80.
18. Belief in the reality of a common core of religious experience has been expressed by Hick on many occasions. See, Arguments for the Existence of God. p.120. Philosophy of Religion. [3rd.edn.] p.115, and An Interpretation of Religion. p.376.
19. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. "Seeing-as and Religious Experience." p.27.
20. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.374-376.
21. G.A.Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine. p.34.
22. This is argued by D.Tracy. "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection." The Thomist.49. [1985.] pp.460-472.
23. J.Milbank. Theology and Social Theory - Beyond Secular Reason. Oxford. Basil Blackwell. 1990. p.385.
24. ibid. p.386.
25. N.Chomsky. Language and Mind. New York. London. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 1972.
26. G.A.Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine. p.96.
27. ibid. pp. 61-62.
28. ibid. ch.3.
29. See K.Surin's criticism of Lindbeck's post-mortem solution in "Many Religions and One True Faith - An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter Three." Modern Theology. [January 1988.]
30. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.33.
31. J.Hick. "Religion as Fact Asserting" in God and the Universe of Faiths. 32. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.176-177.
33. W.A.Christian. Oppositions of Religious Doctrines. London. Macmillan. 1972. p.91.
34. ibid. ch.4.

35. J. Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.363.
36. ibid. pp.240-246.
37. ibid. p.247.
38. ibid. pp.369-371.
39. P.Almond. John Hick's Copernican Theology. Theology 66. [1983] pp.39-40.
40. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.99-100.
41. P.J.Griffiths. An Apology for Apologetics - A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. p.48.
42. ed. J.Hick and B.Hebblethwaite. Christianity and other Religions. Collins. London. Collins. p.100.
43. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.243.
44. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.350.
45. C.Schwöbel. "Particularity, Universality and the Religions," in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1992. p.32.
46. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. London. Macmillan. 1973. p.119. See also, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.107, where he claims that an acknowledgement of the cultural and anthropological conditioning of religions allows us to celebrate their diversity, rather than to advocate an artificial uniformity or homogenization of religious thought and practice.
47. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.371.
48. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. pp.23-24.
49. J.Hick. ibid. p.22-23.
50. G.Loughlin. "Squares and Circles: John Hick and the Doctrine of the Incarnation", in ed. H.Hewitt. Problems in the Philosophy of Religion. Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick. London. Macmillan. 1991. p.190.
51. J.Hick's reply in ibid. p.207.
52. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.369.

53. R.M. Hare. "Theology and Falsification" in (ed. A.Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre) New Essays in Philosophical Theology. London. S.C.M. New York. Macmillan. 1955.
54. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. Pp.113-114.
55. ibid. pp.111-112. See also, God and the Universe of Faiths. p.185.
56. J.Hick. God and Universe of Faiths. p.185.
57. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.123.
58. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. pp.44-45.
59. J.Hick. Death and Eternal Life. London. Collins/Fount. 1976. p.400.
60. ibid. p.407.
61. ibid. p.408. Hick has also made this point in God and the Universe of Faiths. pp.35-36. and in Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.138-139.
62. J.Hick. Death and Eternal Life. pp.400-404.
63. ibid. p.413. See also, God and the Universe of Faiths. pp.192-194.
64. J.Hick. Death and Eternal Life. p.460.
65. ibid. p.460.
66. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.186.
67. J.Hick. Death and Eternal Life. p.464.
68. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.124-125. Hick has continued to affirm a realist view of the after-life, but now acknowledges more explicitly that we cannot know what the ultimate state will be like. He has become increasingly more cautious in making descriptive assertions about the nature of after-life. See The Rainbow of Faiths. p.72.
69. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.361.
70. Examples may be found, among Protestant and Catholic theologians, of those who either refute the possibility of after-life existence altogether, or who describe it in terms that are very pale shadows indeed, of traditional teaching, indeed, of the teaching of Christ according to what are considered authentic scriptural texts. D.Z. Phillips, for example, adopts a non-realist approach to religious language concerning the afterlife. He believes talk of "eternal life" is a reference to the quality of our lives in the here and now, rather than a reference to continued

existence beyond death. For Phillips, there is no such continued existence. D.Z.Phillips. Death and Immortality. London, Macmillan, 1970. Less dismissive, but somewhat vague, is Rahner's suggestion that after-life survival consists in the notion that if the cosmos has an inner, spiritual dimension as well as a material aspect, the spiritual dimension of the cosmos is influenced by the quality of the souls entering it. K.Rahner. "On the Theology of Death." in (ed. A.Robert Capongiri) Modern Catholic Thinkers, an Anthology. pp.21-23. Hick believes it is unclear how the pancosmic soul can be said to influence the world in any way that is tangible. If this is true, he believes that, particularly in the case of Jesus, it ought to be possible to indicate those aspects of the human environment which have been transformed since A.D.30, "but it would be a bold historian who would venture to do this." Death and Eternal Life. p.234.

71. G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. p.44.

72. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.137.

73. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.371.

74. *ibid.* pp.367-370.

75. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. pp.24-25.

76. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.27.

77. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.369-370.

78. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.86.

79. J. Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. P. 369.

80. P.J.Griffiths. An Apology for Apologetics - a Study of the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue.

Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1991. p.49.

81. J.Hick. Truth and Dialogue. p.148. See also, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.107, where he writes,

"...we are also enabled to acknowledge realistically the element of human projection within religious consciousness and, as a corollary, the possibility of perverted forms of religious experience and practice, both within and outside the great traditions. There

is no pressure to suppose that religion is always or necessarily good!"

82. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.340.
83. P.J.Griffiths. An Apology for Apologetics. p.50.
84. *ibid.* p.50.
85. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
86. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.69.
87. *ibid.* p.75.
88. J.Hick. God and the Universe of Faiths. p.145.
89. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.86.
90. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.300.
91. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
92. J. Cobb. "Christian Witness in a Pluralistic World." (eds. J. Hick and H. Askari) The Experience of Religious Diversity. Aldershot and Brookfield. Vermont. Gower. 1985. p.156.
93. J. Hick. "Seeing-as and Religious Experience," in, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.27.
94. J. Hick. Faith and Knowledge. p.144.
95. See chapter 1 of this thesis.
96. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.75.
97. *ibid.* pp.76-77.
98. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.299-300.
99. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.86-87. He makes a similar point in An Interpretation of Religion. p.337.
100. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
101. *ibid.* p.340.
102. W.Pannenberg. "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims." in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1990. p.102.
103. *ibid.*

104. K.Rahner and W. Thusing. A New Christology. London. Burns and Oates. 1980. p.5.
105. J.B.Cobb. "Beyond Pluralism." in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. p.93.
106. For example, see, H.Küng. Eternal Life? London. Collins. 1984. pp.74-76. Also, P. Knitter. "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions." in ed. J. Hick and P. Knitter. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralist Theology of Religions. London. S.C.M. 1988.

CHAPTER 6

Soteriology and Ethics: in search of commonality among World Faiths

In Chapter 1 of this thesis I outlined Hick's philosophy of religious belief and described it as a synthesis of empiricist and rationalist theories, incorporating an argument for the validity of religious experience and an argument for innate human awareness of that which is morally good. I also suggested, however, that he has retreated somewhat from his original stance that the idea of innate human awareness of that which is morally good can be used to underpin an argument to substantiate a religious world-view; Hick now concedes that this awareness is compatible with a naturalistic perspective. In this way Hick's theology has developed in greater alignment with some humanist and secular world-views. Despite his concession that an acceptance of objective morality may be consistent with a naturalistic perspective of the universe and all that is in it, Hick has however retained the view that a crucial dimension of the religious world-view is its relation to moral values. In the development of his theology of religious pluralism, he has considered the possibility of assessing and grading religions, posing as a preliminary to this, two important questions:

1. Is it possible to compare and assess religions at all?
- 2.If it is possible, what kind of criteria would we use, in doing so? 1.

Here, I shall consider his treatment of these questions in detail and attempt to demonstrate that the internal coherence of his theology of religious pluralism is reinforced by his emphasis on religious experience and moral judgement as the means by which human beings should consider these issues.

Hick's assessment of the world religions is, as we shall see, primarily a survey of past events and makes no detailed attempt to prescribe an agenda for future development; it has been his aim to

attempt to judge the religions as they have existed in their historical situations. His conclusion, that while we can to some extent assess and grade religious phenomena, we are unable to assess and grade the religions as totalities is also necessarily retrospective. 2. However, Hick's emphasis on the use of moral criteria - the judgement that looks to "the fruits of the spirit" - as applied to religions, points a way forward, and is in basic alignment with the recent work of theologians such as Knitter and Pieris, who have begun to develop a pragmatic agenda for interreligious encounter, in line with what has been called Liberation Theology. The proposals of liberation theologians centre upon the possibility of a consensus among faiths, concerning global issues of such central importance that they are capable of transcending differences of belief, practice and culture.

This is not to claim that there is at present a high degree of interreligious co-operation between the theologians of religions and those who advocate liberative praxis as their prime concern; Knitter notes that liberation theology, which originated in Christian communities, has until recent times been introspective in outlook;

"...Too many Latin American theologians of liberation [e.g. Segundo and Sobrino] are closed to the liberative and revolutionary potentials of non-Christian religions. A worldwide liberation movement needs a worldwide interreligious dialogue."

3.

A. Pieris believes that,

"...the irruption of the Third World [with its demands for liberation] is also the irruption of the non-Christian world. The vast majority of God's poor perceive their ultimate concern and symbolize their struggle for liberation in the idiom of non-Christian religions and cultures. Therefore, a theology that does not speak to or speak through this non-Christian peoplehood [and its religions] is a luxury of a Christian minority." 4.

Precisely why, and in what ways, the theologies of liberation and of religious pluralism may be mutually enriched and supported by a cross-fertilization of ideas and increased interreligious co-operation, we shall examine in more detail, in relation to Knitter's thesis, in due course. At this point we should simply note that it is possible to discern clear links between Hick's own tentative suggestions for "...*systematic moral criticism, within each tradition, of its own inherited doctrines,*" and the proposals of liberation theology. 5. As we shall see, liberation theologians propose a soteriocentric approach to the theology of religions very similar to that suggested by Hick, and outlined in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Such a soteriocentric approach has decisive implications for the reinterpretation of central Christian doctrines, such as that of the Incarnation, which Hick has consistently advocated since 1973. 6. It will of course be necessary to examine criticisms of such a soteriocentric approach. Ultimately, it will be necessary to reply to those critics who argue that the route towards a "global human ethic" is strewn with difficulties and verges on being morally vacuous, in that it overlooks deep ambiguities in the conception of "human liberation," and relies too heavily on post-Enlightenment liberal ethics, which, in their generality, minimize the particularities of the religions as they exist as living faiths.

Hick's Thesis: "On Grading Religions."

Firstly, Hick asks, what shared criterion is there, among religions, which makes it possible to compare them at all? Clearly, if they have nothing in common, it would be impossible to make any kind of comparison. 7. Religions, he believes, share a common structure which is basically soteriological, ie. all are concerned with providing a transition from a fallen, unsatisfactory human condition, to a limitlessly better one, all offer a path to salvation, liberation or enlightenment. Soteriology is thus the basic criterion by which religions may in principle be compared and judged. 8. This comparison is made possible by human beings in their human judgement in three ways;

1. In relation to their own religious experience.
2. By means of rational scrutiny of the belief systems of others.

3. By moral judgement of the "fruits of the spirit," the working out of religious belief systems by individuals in human history.

Hick believes that,

"...we need to look both at the ideal fruit, visible in the saints of a given tradition, and also at the ordinary life of millions of ordinary people as it takes place within the actual history of that tradition." 9.

Leaving aside, for the present, the critics of the notion of a "common soteriological core," [some of whose criticisms have been examined in Chapter 5, and others which we shall explore in due course,] we should note, with Hick, that in practice as well as in principle, human beings have always exercised judgement regarding religious phenomena. The history of the development of the religions bears witness to the principle and the practice of assessing and comparing the merit of religious phenomena in terms of beliefs, practices, rituals, scriptures and theologies. Not all religious phenomena have been judged, historically, as being equally meritorious. 10. In most cases, the very founding of a religious faith has been dependent on there being some great religious leader [or, in the case of Hinduism, some anonymous Scripture] who is critical of some of the beliefs and ethical practices which constitute the norms of his time, and who is capable of offering a new vision of religious awareness and ethical practice. 11. This vision is capable of capturing the imagination and allegiance of ordinary men and women, who believe themselves to be responding to one who is a mediator of the divine. 12. The kind of judgement exercised by human beings in this way is, Hick believes, primarily a moral judgement, for,

"...although detailed moral codes often differ widely from society to society and meta-ethical theories are highly various and often incompatible, there does seem to be a universal capacity to distinguish [though always within the framework of certain assumptions] between benefitting and harming, and a tendency to bestow moral praise upon actions which benefit and blame upon those which harm others." 13.

Also,

"...the ethical insights of the great teachers are visions of human life lived in earthly alignment with the Real...we can discern the utterly basic principle that it is evil to cause suffering to others and good to benefit others and alleviate or prevent their sufferings." 14.

Hick is arguing that human beings, in their innate capacity to recognize and distinguish between beliefs and actions which are morally praiseworthy, and those which are to be condemned, are behaving in accordance with an awareness that is intrinsic to being human and is rooted in human nature in its relation to the divine nature. The kind of judgement exercised in this way, is, moreover, very far from being ephemeral or transitory in character, it has decisive effects upon subsequent human experience. Human beings find that living their lives in accordance with the particular religious teaching and vision, promoted and practised by the founder of their faith, leads, slowly or rapidly, to a conviction that God, or Ultimate Reality is reached by means of the faith made available to them.

"...as people have taken the step of living in terms of this vision, they have in fact been transformed [whether suddenly or gradually] and so have received a first hand assurance that Reality has indeed been mediated to them." 15.

In this way, and in alignment with his general philosophy of religious belief, Hick describes the way in which moral judgement and religious experience are brought into play by human beings when they attempt to assess and compare religions, such a comparison being made possible by an often unconscious recognition that religions exhibit a common structure that hinges on the notion of soteriology. It is now time to examine in more detail, Hick's analysis of the precise means employed by human beings, in undertaking a comparison of this kind. Afterwards, it will be necessary to examine certain criticisms of Hick's thesis "On Grading Religions", which centre upon the premises of the thesis itself and on his methodology in undertaking a comparison of this kind.

1. Comparison with one's own Religious Tradition

The vast majority of ordinary people, Hick asserts, naturally assess and judge other religions in relation to their own faith, assuming their own tradition to be "the way, the truth and the life."

"...naturally one makes one's own tradition the touchstone by which to judge others. For, in all our judging, assessing, accepting and rejecting, we can only start from where we are, using such degree of truth as we have [or believe that we have] as our stepping stone to further truth." 16.

However, Hick believes that there are good reasons for being dissatisfied with the strategy of judging traditions solely by the criteria of one's own tradition, for this may imply too great a dependence upon religious conditioning associated with birth and upbringing. Hick has frequently asserted that religious allegiance is highly dependent on the accident of birth. ¹⁷ Though a small percentage of people convert from one faith to another, the vast majority remain committed to the faith of their birth. Hick calls this, *"...the genetic and environmental relativity of religious perception and commitment."* ¹⁸

Thus, according to Hick, the reflective person may be disinclined to sever the process of judgement at this point, and to rely upon this means of judging faiths, for this would amount to an acceptance of the conditioning of human judgement by genetic and environmental factors outside one's control; in effect it would be an acceptance of a considerable limitation of human judgement. While this does not logically oblige the individual thinker or believer to look further for criteria with which to judge faiths, Hick does believe this is likely to make him or her dissatisfied with what he calls "genetic confessionalism" as a conscious strategy. ¹⁹ This is further supported by his view that the founding of the great faiths themselves bears witness to the judgement of their founders upon the traditions of their birth and upbringing.

"...The general religious backgrounds of ancient India and the ancient Middle East respectively were of course importantly relevant. But human discriminative capacities must also have been

at work, operating in accordance with at least implicit criteria, in the initial response of these great religious figures; and the question is whether we can uncover these criteria." 20.

Thus Hick affirms that there must be implicit principles of judgement, or objective criteria independent of the religious conditioning of the individual, which can be brought to bear upon the question of evaluating religious traditions. He then proceeds to question whether it is possible to discern the substance of these criteria.

2. Rational Scrutiny of the Belief Systems of other Faiths

As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, Hick's philosophy of religious belief is rooted in an acceptance of the veridical character of religious experience to the individual whose experience it actually is. However, he does not believe it is possible to speak of the rationality [or irrationality] of experience itself. 21. The primary religious experiences of Jesus Christ, Gautama the Buddha and the Hindu saints, which lie at the heart of the great traditions which have been built around them, were fundamentally overwhelming personal experiences which cannot easily be subjected to rational scrutiny. 22. Hick believes we can to some extent attempt to assess by rational judgement the intellectual quality of the philosophies and theologies which have developed within the great faiths; here we would be assessing by means of criteria such as the internal consistency of the faiths' theologies and the adequacy of theological interpretation in relation to the primary religious experience and basic vision of reality upon which the faith is founded. [In these respects, Hick professes to be equally impressed by the quality of the intellectual theories to be found within the faiths.] 23. But the tool of reason cannot be applied to the primary religious experiences themselves, nor to the truth content of the visions of reality which have been built upon them. The truth content of complex belief systems, ie. the cognitive status of religious truth claims is subject to verification eschatologically. This is an empirical rather than a rational test; the nature of absolute reality will become known to us, if at all, by observation and experience, rather than by reason. 24. Such tests as we can apply to religious visions of reality in the here and

now are basically pragmatic. We can try to assess how far they actually assist the believer in his or her path from self-centredness to Reality-centredness. Thus we can ask, are they soteriologically effective? 25.

This leads us to Hick's third criterion for the grading of religions, judgement made on the basis of "the fruits of the spirit."

3. Moral Judgement of "The Fruits of the Spirit."

Hick believes that the religious and moral ideal of love, compassion and generous goodwill, which manifests itself by a radical lessening of egocentricity and a reaching out to all humanity in selfless love, is central to the religious teaching of all the great faiths.

"...The transformations of human existence which the different major visions produce appear, as we see them described in their scriptures and embodied in the lives of their saints, to be equally radical in their nature and equally impressive in their outcomes. Each involves a voluntary renunciation of ego-centredness and a self-giving to, or self-losing in, the Real - a self-giving which brings acceptance, compassion, love for all humankind, or even for all life." 26.

He cites examples of the teachings and scriptures of the great faiths, which enjoin upon their adherents the virtues of loving kindness, compassion, mercy and so on, which in principle should lead to believers acting in ways that are ethically similar, despite their differences in belief. 27.

He believes that in theory an emphasis on "soteria" - the shared concerns for the alleviation of human suffering and the promotion of human welfare - offers a promising ground for the assessment of religions, for this criterion emphasizes praxis and therefore produces results which we are able to observe and assess empirically. This is because, *"...the fruits of the spirit are universally recognised and respected whereas the value of credal and communal loyalty presupposes the accident of birth at some one particular time and place."* 28. Thus, according to

Hick, it is by looking to the actions of men and women in history, [both ordinary human beings and those special individuals who have been acclaimed as saints] that the religions may in principle be assessed and judged.

What we find in practice, however, is that ultimately we are unable to make a judgement that one faith rather than another has a "superior record" in this respect. 29. All have been productive of saints, both active and contemplative; all may provide a soteriological context in which ordinary men and women may make the transition from ego-centredness to Reality-centredness. This is the religious ideal, but the reality falls short of this standard.

"...Each tradition, viewed as a historical reality spanning many centuries, is an unique mixture of good and evil, embodied in the lives of saints and sinners, sometimes forming liberating but more often oppressive social structures, giving birth both to human nobility and to human beastliness, to justice and injustice, to beauty and ugliness." 30.

Difficult as it is to assess the relative merits of the great faiths as intellectual systems, it is even more difficult to assess them in terms of their adherence to or violation of what Hick has called the Golden Rule;

"...when we seek to go beyond the identification of particular phenomena as good or evil, to make ethical judgements concerning the religious traditions as totalities, we encounter large complicating factors which must give pause to any project for the moral grading of the great world faiths." 31.

Because of the internal complexity and diversity of the great faiths, and the fact that they cannot be viewed as isolated entities apart from the historical and cultural milieu in which they have grown up and developed, Hick concludes that it is impossible to assess and grade religious traditions as totalities. 32. He does however concede that it is possible to submit particular religious phenomena and particular religious doctrines to critical judgement.

There can be "...systematic moral criticism, within each tradition, of its own inherited doctrines."

33. Here, I believe, we may discern the nucleus of a possible meeting point between the theology of religious pluralism and the theologies of liberation, which we shall examine in more detail in due course.

Criticisms of Hick's Thesis: "On Grading Religions."

1. Arguments supporting the view that "external" traditions must be judged by the "internal" standards of the critic's own tradition.

Hick, as I have noted, rejects the strategy of assessing and judging religious traditions by the criteria and standards of the individual's own tradition. He believes that to do so is to accept that the substance of one's faith, one's most cherished beliefs and practices, may be little more than the products of the accident of birth and subsequent religious conditioning. He asks;

"...can one be unquestioningly confident that the religion which one happens to have inherited by birth is indeed normative and that all others are properly to be graded by their likeness or unlikeness to it?" 34.

It is important to note that Hick is not suggesting that such unquestioning confidence always and necessarily exists when the believer affirms the truth claims of the tradition of his or her birth, but he does seem to be saying that if and when religious affirmations are rooted in this kind of unquestioning confidence, this implies a lack of critical discernment. For if religious loyalty is determined by factors outside the individual's control, critical judgement is necessarily limited and impaired. The unacceptability of what he has called "genetic confessionalism" inclines [though it does not oblige] the reflective person to search for objective criteria by which to evaluate his or her own tradition, as well as the traditions of others. 35.

However, some theologians do not accept this view, and believe that some form of the strategy rejected by Hick is the only possible approach to the judgement of faiths, and the only way to

prevent inter-faith dialogue from descending into a morass of relativity. The theologian may also hold that it is impossible to approach dialogue from any perspective other than that which is rooted in the theoretical basis of his or her faith; to fail to do so constitutes a betrayal of the truth claims of that faith. This, for some Christian theologians, implies an obligation to approach dialogue and the judgement of faiths from a christocentric perspective.

One such theologian is Newbigin, who has criticized what he believes is Hick's dichotomy between the "confessional" and the "truth-seeking" approach to dialogue. Hick has written;

"...at one extreme there is a purely confessional dialogue in which each partner witnesses to his own faith, convinced that his has absolute truth while his partner's has only relative truth. At the other extreme is a truth-seeking dialogue in which each is conscious that Transcendent Being is infinitely greater than his own limited vision of it, and in which they accordingly seek to share their vision in the hope that each may be helped towards a fuller awareness of the Divine Reality before which they both stand." 36.

Newbigin is right to question the implications of this if, as he believes, Hick is suggesting that those who "confess" a particular faith necessarily fail to be truth-seekers. However, in this criticism of Hick, Newbigin takes insufficient note of the fact that, here, Hick is referring to the whole spectrum of possible Christian approaches to dialogue; the possibility has to be accepted that, at the furthest extreme such an approach, as and when it exists, does imply a failure to exercise critical judgement of the individual's own faith in relation to others. 37. Newbigin's own stance is even more unsatisfactory; he writes,

"...no standpoint is available to any man except the point where he stands;...there is no platform from which one can claim to have an objective view which supersedes all the subjective faith-commitments of the world's faiths...every man must take his stand

on the floor of the arena, on the same level with every other, and there engage in the real encounter of ultimate commitment with those who, like him, have staked their lives on their vision of the truth." 38.

This, I believe, is a premature rejection of the search to find objective criteria by which to judge faiths, which fails to take seriously Hick's reasons for insisting on the need to do so, and has important implications for Newbigin's own theology of religions. Simply, it leaves too many important questions unanswered. Probing further, one might ask, for what reasons do individuals "stake their lives" on their vision of the truth? How do they obtain such visions and how do they know they are true? Newbigin's answer would probably be rooted in the facts of Christian revelation, centring on the testimony of the New Testament witnesses. However, such a reply would not succeed in providing a satisfactory answer to Hick's suggestion that "confessionalism" may be rooted in the religious conditioning of birth and upbringing. As I suggested in Chapter 2, Newbigin's concessions to the historical relativity of human knowledge and human belief are inconsistent. He accepts that;

"...there are no "truths of reason" except those that have been developed in a historical tradition... every exercise of reason depends on a social and linguistic tradition which is, therefore something which has the contingent, accidental character of all historical happenings." 39.

However, he also holds that,

"...within the Christian tradition the Bible is received as a testimony to those events in which God has disclosed ["revealed"] the shape of the story as a whole, because in Jesus the beginning and the end of the story, the Alpha and the Omega, are revealed, made known, disclosed." 40.

Newbigin writes as if the testimony of the biblical witnesses in some sense transcends the limitations of truths of reason which, by his own axioms, are specific to particular historical and

cultural situations. In holding to the absolute status of Christian revelation and the absolute truth revealed therein, Newbigin seems to exempt the biblical testimony from the qualifications which he would impose upon all other historical testimonies, and, as I have argued, fails to account for the possibility of genetic and environmental conditioning in the confessional stance of the biblical witnesses, which may [and only may] have predisposed them towards an incarnational interpretation of the events of scripture. 41. One must, logically, accept the thesis of the anthropological conditioning of religious thinking in relation to all believers and witnesses, or not accept it at all. What one cannot do with consistency, is accept it selectively, as Newbigin seems to do.

Another theologian who affirms the necessity of judging faiths by the criteria and standards of his own faith "in a nuanced form" is D'Costa, who has more recently outlined his reasons for rejecting alternative approaches, specifically in relation to texts by H. Netland and K. Ward. 42. The purpose of D'Costa's paper is not primarily, to defend his own stance, but to demonstrate, in relation to the chosen texts, that the search for common neutral criteria by which to judge faiths is doomed to failure, for such criteria are always and necessarily tradition specific. 43. D'Costa's thesis is that, "...in relation to the increased specificity of an alleged neutral proposal its neutrality diminishes" and also that, "...in relation to the decreased specificity of an alleged neutral proposal its usefulness diminishes." 44.

Persuasive though his arguments are in relation to the texts he criticizes, it remains the case that the renunciation of the search to identify objective criteria for the evaluation of faiths is premature, and implicitly, constitutes a failure to deal with the argument raised by Hick with relation to the very important possibility of faith being determined by "genetic confessionalism." In fairness to D'Costa, it is not his main purpose, in this particular paper, to defend his own preferred approach to the evaluation of faiths, though he does note certain criticisms which have been directed towards it. He notes that the judgement of faiths by the criteria of one's own faith has been labelled "jingoistic" in association with a reactionary trend against political, economic and religious imperialism in a post-colonial age, and that certain sociological, anthropological and philosophical arguments have centred upon the impossibility of comparing traditions at all, given the high levels

of incommensurability between them. 45. The question of the incommensurability of faiths is one we shall have to return to shortly, as being of crucial importance to a thesis which suggests the possibility of a global theology of religions based on shared moral criteria. At this point however, I wish simply to note that D'Costa does not mention what I believe is the most serious indictment against the theory that faiths must be judged by the standards and criteria of the theologian or believer's own faith, which centres upon Hick's notion of "genetic confessionalism." To recap, Hick's belief is that,

"...the possibility must persistently recur to any intelligent person, who has taken note of the broad genetic and environmental relativity of the forms of religious commitment, that to assess the traditions of the world by the measure of one's own tradition may merely be to be behaving, predictably, in accordance with the conditioning of one's own upbringing. These considerations do not logically oblige anyone to look for other criteria for assessing religious phenomena than simply their congruence or lack of congruence with the features of one's own tradition. But they do, I think, make it difficult to be happy with what might be called genetic confessionalism as a deliberate view." 46.

It may be argued that this position of Hick's is itself tradition specific and that it arises because of particular theological presuppositions, for example, Hick's conviction that an all-loving God would not have revealed himself in time and place to one specific group of people, and that every human apprehension of the divine is partial and incomplete. Thus, it may be argued, a pluralist conception of Ultimate Reality is presupposed, and grounds the theological enterprise from its outset. To some extent, this would be a valid criticism, in that the anthropological approach to theology freely acknowledges the significance of cultural and historical conditioning, including the conditioning of its own time and place. What this argument overlooks, however, is that the very fact of acknowledging this significance is to acknowledge, equally, the significance of genetic confessionalism, and thereby to seek to move beyond its confines as a deliberate strategy. It could

equally be argued that all theological enterprises start from the basis of some presuppositions, and ought therefore, to submit themselves to critical scrutiny of them; the position of genetic confessionalism, as a deliberate view, must be a denial of such critical scrutiny.

This is not to suggest that D'Costa, or any other Christian theologian who adheres to a christocentric approach to the evaluation of other faiths is primarily motivated, or motivated at all, by what Hick has called genetic confessionalism, for in fact D'Costa and others have advanced persuasive reasons for retaining their christocentric stance elsewhere. 47. But I am suggesting that the failure to produce a persuasive counter-argument dealing with this specific objection of Hick's is a serious omission. Unless and until there is a counter argument which suggests that Hick's objection is invalid, the argument for the need to find objective criteria for the evaluation of faiths must remain. For if Hick is right in suggesting that theologians and believers may be conditioned in this way, then they also must perceive the need to attempt to judge faiths by some kind of external criteria, or accept the thesis of the anthropological conditioning of all theological thinking, including their own. It is precisely because of the fact of genetic and environmental relativity in relation to religious commitment, which clearly supports the view that most believers remain committed to the religious tradition of their birth and upbringing, that the need to judge faiths by some kind of external criteria arises.

2. Criticism of the Notion of Common Soteriological Structure

The conclusion Hick has drawn from his survey of the merits [and demerits] of the great world faiths is relatively non-controversial; it would be a brave theologian who would assert that we are able to produce a "league table" of religions, based on observable ethical merits. There has, however, been considerable criticism of Hick's attempt to make this kind of comparison in the first place, in particular with respect to the notion of "soteriological effectiveness" or "a common soteriological core" to be discerned within the religions. Critics suggest that the generic term "soteriology" cannot be used to encompass the concepts of "salvation" "liberation" or

"enlightenment" for the same thing is not meant by each; there is no "common soteriological core." 48. Further, that the notion of "soteria" itself is vague and theoretically unfounded in the religions themselves. 49.

Some of these criticisms have already been considered; we saw in Chapter 5 that Pannenberg believes that the Christian concept of "salvation" must be located within a specifically Christian context, and cannot be considered synonymous within the concepts of "liberation" and "enlightenment", found within the Eastern traditions. 50. Also, that it is Lindbeck's view that religions, in their diversity, manifest no common framework that can be loosely defined as "soteriological." 51. This view is echoed by David Tracy;

"...There are family resemblances among the religions. But as far as I can see there is no single essence, no one content of enlightenment or revelation, no one way of emancipation or liberation, to be found in all that plurality." 52.

The essence of this kind of criticism is not simply the variety of soteriological aims discernible among the faiths, however, but their incompatibility. Philip Almond has written of pluralism's "principle of soteriological equality," which results, he believes, in a tendency to blur the distinctive features of the soteriological doctrines of other faiths, and finally results in an undifferentiated concept of salvation, to which no tradition, including Christianity, would subscribe. 53. J.A. DiNoia shares this view, also emphasising the primacy of the traditions' comprehensive doctrinal structures, which foster patterns of cognitive and affective dispositions, and provide shape for overall patterns of life, towards prescribed religious goals. He holds that;

"...it is misleading to extract soteriological fragments from the various patterns of life commended by other communities in order to show that all of them aim at salvation, because salvation in some form, or Christian salvation implicitly, is what all religions seek in their doctrines and life." 54.

DiNoia believes the criticism of "extracting soteriological fragments" can be levelled at both inclusivist and pluralist theologians, but more particularly at pluralists. However, I would argue

that the reverse is true, and that this charge [if it is valid at all] must be most applicable to inclusivist attitudes towards the soteriological aims of other faiths. Hick, as we noted in Chapter 5, in relation to Cobb's dissatisfaction with the idea of a "common ineffable referent" as the focus of religious soteriologies, fully acknowledges the variety of soteriological aims, which, nevertheless, he believes are mutually compatible rather than mutually exclusive. 55. He has adopted the formula of writing of "salvation, liberation or enlightenment," to underline his acknowledgement that precisely the same thing is not meant by each concept. Inclusivists, however, are less concerned to account for the diversity of traditions, and focus, rather, upon the possibility of grace in non-Christian traditions, seeking to accord a modified salvific role to non-Christian faiths. We saw in Chapter 4 that within Rahner's theology, non-Christians may attain "salvation in Christ," while nevertheless pursuing soteriological recommendations that are specific to their own faiths [and which, according to Almond, DiNoia et.al. cannot be accommodated under the Christian conceptual "umbrella" of salvation.] Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian certainly implies that, through grace, there is a hidden salvific core in non-Christian faiths, and explicitly states that salvation, if it is obtained, is definitively, the same salvation made available through grace in Christ.

Pluralists, on the contrary, are considerably more open to an acknowledgement of the variety and diversity of soteriological aims, and are less concerned to impose alien soteriological goals upon the faiths. Pluralists such as Hick have sought to overcome the kind of objections raised by Almond and DiNoia by the proposal that no specific or non-specific religious end-point, Attainment of Nirvana/Enlightenment, Union with the Blessed Trinity/Salvation, perfectly describes ultimate reality, but only aims at describing it, for,

"...what is ultimately Real is beyond human conception and human grasp in this life...the Real is so rich in content that it can only be finitely experienced in the various partial and inadequate ways which the history of religions describes." 56.

Also, *"...the divine nature is infinite, exceeding the scope of all human concepts, and is capable of being experienced as personal Lord and as non-personal ground or depth of being."* 57. DiNoia is unconvinced by this, however, since, *"...conceptions of the end of life function as objectives that specify dispositions, activities and patterns of activity nonetheless."* 58. DiNoia seems to reject the possibility of evaluating religious traditions in general, and religious soteriologies in particular, beyond the confines of the doctrinal structures which give outward shape to the religious communities' understanding of the nature of reality. He does not envisage that it may be necessary to seek beyond a simple surface conflict in doctrines, eg. Trinity/Nirvana, to the underlying religious experience which is only partially encapsulated within a doctrinal structure. But as I have argued, with Hick, in Chapter 1, if doctrines are ultimately human constructs, related to but less than the totality of religious experience, then such a search is called for. DiNoia does not explore the possibility, suggested by Hick, that where there is genuine love, compassion and goodwill, these fruits of the spirit are manifestly observable by human beings, and that there is thus, a pragmatic test available to us by which religious soteriologies may be judged, at least in theory.

DiNoia's own solution to the problem of evaluating other faiths' soteriological aims, without revising them or lumping them together under the tradition-specific Christian "umbrella" of salvation, in fact takes us very little further forward. He believes,

"...appropriate Christian valuations of such qualities could be framed in terms of an "eschatological" rather than a present salvific value. The specific ways in which the presently observable and assessable conduct and dispositions of non-Christians will conduce to their future salvation are now hidden from view and known only to God." 59.

Also,

"...other religions are to be valued by Christians not because they are channels of grace or means of salvation for their adherents, but because they play a real but as yet perhaps not fully

specifiable role in the divine plan to which the Christian community bears witness." 60.

This amounts to saying, firstly, that the real eschatological worth of soteriological doctrines is unknown to us, but known only to God. Surely, however, if this true, it must be true of human knowledge in relation to all soteriological doctrines; we cannot "know" indubitably, the worth of our own specific soteriological doctrines, while also claiming it is impossible to know the worth of others, if we wish to claim any consistency in the epistemology of knowledge. Secondly, the notion of "a real but as yet not fully specifiable role in the divine plan" is also problematic. If something cannot be specified, it is almost impossible to know that it is real, and DiNoia can have very little, if any, ground for optimism regarding the intrinsic worth of such non-specifiable religious roles. The idea is that a religious role *"...can be understood to be a providential one [indirectly contributory] though not salvific [directly contributory]"* 61. This, however, seems to a very vague and insubstantial role to be ascribed to God's divine providence, and lacks content in that it explains nothing as regards the real nature and function of such roles.

Having examined the criticisms of some of those who reject the notion of common soteria among the faiths, I would argue that even if it is held that soteriology does not constitute a common core among the faiths, it has not been shown conclusively, that it cannot be considered a common, though phenomenologically diverse aspect of faiths; this approach does not entail disregard for, or disrespect towards, the particular soteriological aims of the traditions, nor does it ascribe to them aims that are alien to their doctrinal structures. It is simply an observation relating to certain common preoccupations shared by the traditions; their concerns may be said to centre upon human nature and human destiny in relation to what is ultimately real, even though they conceive the human predicament and the true nature of reality somewhat differently. We can scarcely exclude the idea of soteriology from Christianity, for example, without denying a great deal of Jesus' teaching centred upon the idea of "The Kingdom of God." It will be necessary, presently, to examine the implications of a "Kingdom Centred" hermeneutic, in relation to what certain liberation theologians see as the implications of this upon central Christian doctrines. For the

present, however, it may be worthwhile to examine more closely the implications of rejecting the concept of soteriology as common ground among the faiths.

Soteriology as Common Ground

The suggestion I wish to make is that those theologians who deny the existence of a common soteriological structure among religions do seem to encounter a major problem in advocating interreligious dialogue. On what basis can such dialogue take place, if "common ground" among the religions is denied? If disparate traditions are deemed to be completely incommensurable then, logically, it cannot follow that they can have any reason to engage in dialogue. Judgements of the levels of incommensurability vary, and, presumably, no theologian who advocates interreligious dialogue can hold the view that the disparity between traditions is such as to render them incomparable, for the acceptance of such a high degree of incommensurability would imply that dialogue would indeed be a fruitless exercise. The question which needs to be asked, clearly, is what exactly does constitute commonality among the traditions? Put simply, what is it that makes some Christians and Buddhists wish to engage in dialogue as opposed, for example, to Christians and supporters of Manchester United Football Club? The fact that dialogue takes place between certain groups of persons and not others, presupposes a mutual recognition of certain common concepts. The basic requirement of some common ground as a prerequisite for dialogue has been argued for by Hick, as we have seen, and also by Knitter. 62. Both these theologians suggest that the criteria for discerning common ground centres on the notion of common soteria. If the notion of common soteria constituting common ground is rejected, there remains a need to define what else might be deemed to constitute common ground.

As I have suggested, those theologians who hold the view that religious traditions are completely incommensurable must, logically, distance themselves from interreligious dialogue; this is in fact the stance of John Milbank, who believes that the variety and diversity of religious beliefs and practices is so great that no genus that can be called "religion" can be discerned. 63. He writes,

"...comparative religion should give way to the contrasting of cultures...the practice of dialogue incorporates the assumption that religion is an area of universal human concern that we can consider, contemplate and talk about." 64.

For Milbank, this is a false assumption. He defends his distancing from the "scenario" of inter-faith dialogue by the suggestion that those who participate may be guilty of an ethnocentric desire to uncover other routes to their own definitively religious goals. 65. However, as we shall see when we examine the issue of shared ethical concerns among the faiths, there is in fact greater consensus regarding shared goals and common ethical concerns than Milbank concedes, although he is clearly correct in pointing out the diversity of their beliefs.

What seems to emerge from the debate regarding commonality or diversity among the faiths, and the possibility or otherwise of engaging in dialogue, is that there is in fact no consensus among those who are nevertheless in agreement in their rejection of religious pluralism. [Sufficiently so, at least, to contribute to the same volume of essays.] 66. The implication of this is that there is a crucial need to uncover and examine the criteria of commonality among the faiths in greater depth, to question in what sense soteria might be deemed a sphere of common ground and to ask what possible alternative criteria may be discerned by those who reject this notion, while nevertheless advocating dialogue. This is a matter we shall need to return to shortly, after examining the arguments of those who, with Hick, believe that religions do exhibit structural similarity which may be broadly defined as soteriological. It is worth noting that several other theologians are in agreement with Hick, that religions do exhibit a common soteriological structure, and that the essence of religions is one of repairing the unsatisfactory state of the human condition and generating a new human fulfilment. 67. Knitter writes,

"...To assert that all religious soteriologies begin by identifying a dissatisfying or broken state of human affairs which they then try to repair may sound sweepingly simplistic. But it is,

fundamentally, true. And it does imply that all religions, in a vast variety of ways, do seek to fix or promote human welfare." 68.

Although he concedes, with Tracy, that around this soteriocentric core there is nevertheless a bewildering plurality of religious beliefs and concerns which may be as contradictory as they are varied, he believes that this plurality need not rule out a soteriocentric approach to the understanding of religions. 69. And surely it must be the case that the frank avowal of the existence of plurality - even opposition - is nothing more than a recognition of the anthropological conditioning of all theological thinking in a pluralist world. In other words it means saying that, as a Christian, I know that I will approach dialogue from a Christian perspective, for it is impossible for me to do otherwise, if I am to remain the person that I am. The same must apply to my partner in dialogue, whether he or she is a Hindu or a Buddhist or a Jew or a Muslim. It means recognising that there can be no such being as a totally unconditioned religious believer, and acknowledging the significance of this conditioning. It means recognising the truth that exists in an acknowledgement that Jesus is central and decisive for the Christian, but also relative, despite the tensions produced by this paradox.

The paradox of personal commitment to Jesus, and genuine and complete openness to the religions of others brought about by recognition and acceptance of the relativism of Jesus, is at the heart of a pluralist theology of religions. The facts of a religiously plural world clearly indicate that Jesus is in some very real and inevitable sense, relative to the experience of Christians alone. An acceptance of this relativism opens up the possibility of liberating Christianity from the thorny question of the uniqueness of Christ, upon which so much theological dispute has centred. Traditional christology could be redefined in terms of a new centre based on those issues which concerned Christ absolutely in his historical lifetime, and formed the substance of his teaching, and which still concern the world today, in its search for a global ethic. In other words, there could be a shift from christocentrism to anthropocentrism, a shift which implies a greater emphasis upon the substance of the Gospel teaching as it impinges on the lives of human beings in their human conditions, as opposed to the doctrinal structures which have been built upon it. These, as

I argued in Chapter 5, are ultimately human constructs, subject to the anthropological conditioning of all theological thinking. Christianity, in adopting an anthropologically orientated centre, would then be truly open to the search for mediators of what is called within Christianity, "the will of God," outside the tradition. This suggestion is not made simply to smooth the path of inter-faith dialogue - though it could certainly help to do so - but is rooted in observation and human experience of what is undeniably a pluralist world, and reflection on the unanswered question, why should this be so? 70. It does however ultimately imply a rejection of a Christocentric approach to inter-faith dialogue, so tenaciously held by some Christian theologians. 71.

As I suggested above, a crucial question seems to hinge on the matter of what constitutes commonality among the traditions. The disputed issue has centred upon the notion of soteriology, viewed as a structural similarity. Critics have questioned whether commonality of structure constitutes sufficient ground for dialogue, and whether it implies commonality of goal or purpose. D'Costa has written, in relation to Ward's recent work in support of religious pluralism based on shared moral criteria, that he, *"...simply jumps from assuming a common structure [a movement towards a supreme objective value] to conflating that structure with content, and therefore a common goal."* He calls this a *"...classical case of a category mistake; the confusion of the categories of form and content."* 72.

However, it seems to me that what we have here is in fact three categories, form, content and purpose/goal, and that it may clarify the issue of discerning commonality and/or disparity among the traditions to consider these ideas within the framework of a threefold categorical distinction. For example, we may define the religious "form/structure", within Christianity, as the outward and visible phenomena of the Church itself, the people of God, envisaged as the Body of Christ. Its "content" consists of the patterns of liturgy and worship institutionalised therein. Its "purpose/goal" might refer, within Christianity, to the apprehension of the beatific vision, beyond death. Similar analysis could be applied to other world faiths, or to other institutions. An analogy may serve to illustrate the point. Educational establishments, schools, colleges or universities, may be deemed to manifest structural similarity, towards a common but only partially conceived goal

[for what, in its entirety, do we encompass in the idea of "an educated person"?] The content of such establishments, in terms of what is actually taught, may however, be radically dissimilar. The point is that, if similarity of structure is presupposed, this may point to similarity or dissimilarity of purpose/goal, via similar or dissimilar content, for, given a threefold categorical distinction, the permutations naturally increase.

In the case of the religions, I would suggest that we may discern something of the same kind. Similarity of structure may lead to similarity of goal - an understanding of, and communion or union with Transcendent Reality, which is beyond human grasp in the mundane world - via dissimilarity of content. Within this schema, the "soteriological emphasis" is shifted from the category of structure to the category of purpose or goal. My suggestion is that it may be the case that a certain amount of theological disagreement centring on the soteriological issue has been caused by the emphasis on soteriology as a structural similarity among faiths, [Hick, Knitter] when in fact "common soteria" may be best understood within the category of purpose or goal, rather than within the category of structure. A shift in the understanding of faiths as soteriological in purpose or goal, rather than soteriological in structure may, I believe, help to clarify the concerns expressed in this particular theological issue. This is not to suggest, however, that such a shift in emphasis entirely eradicates the problem of whether or not soteriology may be considered common ground among the faiths. One theologian who does seem to view soteriology as a category of goal or purpose is Netland, however, he is in basic agreement with Pannenberg, Lindbeck, and DiNoia, that the notion of common soteria, viewed as a religious goal, does not function in this way.

"...Certainly the major religions are all concerned in some sense with the theme of "salvation"- that is, the "transition from a radically unsatisfactory state to a limitlessly better one"... But Hick minimizes differences in conceptions of salvation by speaking as if all religions share a common soteriological goal and a common understanding of what constitutes salvation." 73.

It is Netland's contention that, since the major religions analyze the human predicament in different ways, their notions of salvation, enlightenment or liberation equally, differ; each is

applicable only to the respective faith's conception of the human condition. Hence, the notion of soteriology cannot be detached from the question of exclusive truth claims. Here, Netland seems to share the views of DiNoia, for he states,

"...a given religion can be regarded as soteriologically effective only if its diagnosis of the human condition is accurate and if its proposed way of achieving the intended soteriological goal will indeed bring about the desired effect...the question of the truth of basic beliefs about the human predicament, and the ways of release from that predicament, cannot be avoided." 74.

Netland is arguing that the traditions' conceptions of the human condition predetermine their conceptions of soteriology. If, as the Christian holds, the human condition is characterized by alienation from God as a result of human sinfulness, salvation is conceived as being made possible by the saving action of Christ. Conversely, [in Netland's view] if, as the Buddhist holds, the human condition is in fact one of ignorance of the true nature of reality, in association with craving and desire, liberation will be achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The primacy of religious truth claims, particularly as they relate to differences in the ways of conceiving and responding to the divine Reality [ie. awareness of the divine as personal or impersonal] is emphasised by Netland as determining the traditions' diverse conceptions of soteriology. In this respect Netland's thesis is similar to that of DiNoia, which we examined above.

What is questionable, however, is whether it is necessary to adopt an attitude of exclusive disjunction in relation to these opposing truth claims, and hence to the nature of soteriology, as an alternative to Hick's analysis, which suggests that they are partial and incomplete human responses to the totality of religious truth. 75. The Christian conception of the human predicament as characterized by alienation from God is not necessarily contradicted by an additional insight that it is also one of ignorance and preoccupation with craving and desire, for it could be held that the "sinfulness" of craving and desire significantly increase this same alienation. Likewise, the Buddhist insight into the nature of the human condition is not contradicted by the conception of

humanity as alienated from God: if "God" is conceived as that which is ultimately Real, ignorance of Him/Her/It is not radically dissimilar from alienation from Him/Her/It, though the difference in the conception of Ultimate Reality as personal or impersonal clearly remains. 76. Central to Netland's thesis is the belief that where the truth claims of Christianity are deemed to be incompatible with those of other religious traditions, the latter are to be rejected. 77. However, my contention is that here, he does not succeed in demonstrating the kind of incompatibility which would invalidate the idea of a "common soteriological purpose" as applicable to the religions as they function as living faiths, though it must be conceded that the substance of what may be termed their "soteriological recommendations" remains tradition specific.

Netland's argument, as I have stated, centres upon his conviction that the fact of oppositions in religious doctrines rules out the possibility of viewing soteriology as common ground among the faiths, for the significant ontological claims about reality, upheld by the faiths, are also held by them to be essential for salvation, liberation or enlightenment. He rejects Hick's view that,

"...both correct and incorrect trans-historical beliefs, like correct and incorrect historical and scientific beliefs, can form a part of a religious totality that mediates the Real to human beings, constituting an effective context within which the salvific process occurs." 78.

Netland believes that,

"...the suggestion must be rejected that many disagreements over doctrinal belief are unimportant since they are irrelevant to salvation. That correct belief [among other things] is essential for salvation is accepted in most religions." 79.

This may be disputed in two ways. Firstly, it is not necessarily the case that correct belief is held to be strictly necessary for salvation within Christianity, at least, not according to Rahner's theology in relation to the theory of the anonymous Christian. Secondly, as I suggested in Chapter 5, the problem here, clearly recognised by Hick, but overlooked or minimized by others, including Netland, is that we simply have no indubitable way of knowing which of the disputed doctrinal

claims made by the religious traditions are actually true; there are no answers, according to the present state of human knowledge, to such questions as, "is the universe eternal, or did it have a beginning?" which would amount to definitive knowledge capable of commanding a general consensus outside the specific faith community which upholds a particular "answer" to questions such as this. Therefore, it is very far from easy to dismiss Hick's belief that, *"...it seems implausible that our final destiny should depend upon our professing beliefs about matters of trans-historical fact concerning which we have no definitive information."* 80. Nor is it reasonable to reject his suggestion that,

"...we shall always hope for new evidence or new arguments which will make the truth plain to all; but in the meantime we should regard the matter as one about which it would be unwise to be unyieldingly dogmatic." 81.

If, as I believe he is, Hick is urging the religious traditions to modify their stance regarding doctrinal conflict, in effect, recommending the pluralist option as a viable alternative in the theology of religions, it must be conceded that this is a radical proposal. Nevertheless, it is not one that can be easily dismissed by the faiths, while they are unable to resolve the disputed issues of doctrinal conflict, except with recourse to ecclesiastical or scriptural authority. For as we shall see, when we examine the influence of post-Enlightenment rationality and post-Enlightenment ethics upon the modern world, such questions as "what grounds has the religious believer for affirming his or her faith?" are not answered, but only removed one stage further away, by appeals to doctrinal structures and institutional authority.

The Limitations of Hick's thesis: "On Grading Religions."

Hick's thesis as I have outlined it is very generalized; he emphasises the shared concerns which he claims all religions demonstrate for the promotion of human welfare, but he does not spell out in detail the precise content of these ethical concerns. His analysis, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, is primarily retrospective; it is to the religions as they have actually existed in human

history that he has looked, in his attempt to assess and judge them on the basis of their "moral fruits." This thesis is moreover, heavily dependent on a presupposition of moral objectivity - that there are some moral norms which are universally accepted - and it is by no means the case, within moral philosophy, that there is a general consensus on this "realist" conception of morality itself. 82. It will be necessary, presently, to attempt to refute the prevailing scepticism which holds that there are no moral principles which are true and valid beyond reasonable doubt and therefore universally binding. However, it is clearly the case that, even given a presupposition of moral objectivity, Hick's thesis requires some development, and the content of "shared ethical concerns" needs to be spelled out in more precise detail, if we are to begin to develop a useful consensus among the faiths, for a theology of religious pluralism based on shared ethical criteria. Hick states that,

"...it would be anachronistic to look for doctrines of universal human rights and a theology of political or economic liberation in the "ages of faith" when political power and responsibility were beyond the horizon of all except those at the top of the social hierarchy." 83.

He thereby implicitly acknowledges that the religions as they have existed in their historical situations have not had, and could not be expected to have had, the kind of concerns which impinge on human consciousness today, nor an awareness of what might be called structural evil. It appears that there may be scope here for inter-faith dialogue, in order to define the nature of ethical concerns in a new age of sociological consciousness. Hick has noted the radical shift in consciousness which may be discerned in the modern world.

"...this new consciousness presupposes an historical situation which is itself new, namely one in which power, and hence political responsibility have been dispersed in the democratising movements of the last two or three centuries. Until the modern period human liberation could usually only mean the inner freeing

of the individual, a transformation that was expressed outwardly in acts of individual charity." 84.

Today, however, given a greater understanding of the dynamics of socio-economic life, and the recognition that the social order of a given historical period does not exist by divine appointment, Hick believes the call is for a recreation of human society on a basis of justice and equality. 85. What he has not done, however, is to formulate a precise agenda for this proposed reformation of the social and economic structures of the world.

Such reforming proposals are, indeed, deceptively simple in their formulation, and may easily fail to take into account that it is by no means easy to define precisely what we mean by the notions of justice, equality and liberation. Critics point out that any agenda for the recreation and reformation of the social and economic structures of the world based on these principles runs the risk of descending into a morass of generalization and abstraction. D'Costa has rightly pointed out, in relation to the recent work of Ward, that to probe a transcendental understanding of the concept of "value", and the possibilities of seeking value, does not actually take us any nearer to discovering what the material content of value might be. 86. It is also his view that, since religions circumscribe their world and their understanding of what it is to be human, it is necessary to root the ideas of "liberation", "justice" or "human welfare" firmly within the confines of the paradigms and norms which shape the traditions.

This criticism has been directed specifically towards Knitter's developing thesis towards a liberation theology of religions.

"...the paradigmatic and normative sources of a tradition shape their understanding of what the human condition is and what it ought to be. Hence, promoting human welfare is an unhelpful common denominator as it specifies nothing in particular until each tradition addresses itself to what is meant by "human" and the "welfare" of human beings." 87.

However, as I hope to demonstrate, Knitter's proposals for a theology of liberation do in fact manage to circumvent the pitfalls of abstraction and to provide a meeting point for the theologies of liberation and religious pluralism, in ways that may be acceptable for the faiths as they find themselves in a self-consciously pluralist historical situation.

An Agenda for a Global Theology of Religions based on Ethical Criteria. P.Knitter; H.Küng; M.Braybrooke

An agenda for a theology of religions based on shared ethical criteria has been proposed by Paul Knitter, who believes the contemporary world provides a new "kairos", a unique global context for interreligious encounter, centred upon a common concern for issues of human welfare which are of such vital importance that they transcend differences of religion and culture. 88. Interreligious dialogue would be based, not on an artificially contrived, universalist religious viewpoint, but upon a shared concern for "soteria" or liberation from the evils of human experience. Knitter's schematization is, essentially, an evolutionary development within his theology of religious pluralism. In No Other Name he proposed a shift from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism to theocentrism in an attempt to avoid affirming the normativity of the Church, or Christ, as truth criteria, for the multireligious realities which impose themselves upon Christian consciousness clearly suggest to him that there are other ways of salvation, experienced and articulated in diverse forms. Therefore, to assert the normativity of Christ, "...seems to contradict our present experience." 89. In response to criticisms that the notion of "theos" is incommensurable with the belief systems of certain faiths, such as Buddhism, he has now moved a stage further.

"...If Christian attitudes have evolved from ecclesiocentrism to christocentrism to theocentrism, they must now move on to what in Christian symbols might be called "kingdom-centrism", or, more universally, "soteriocentrism." For Christians, that which constitutes the basis and the goal for interreligious dialogue, that which makes mutual understanding and cooperation between the

religions possible...that which unites the religions in common discourse and praxis, is not how they are related to the church...or how they are related to Christ...nor even how they respond to and conceive of God, but rather to what extent they are promoting soteria [in Christian images, the basileia] - to what extent they are engaged in promoting the human welfare and bringing about liberation with and for the poor and nonpersons."

90.

He also believes that, *"...where religions do not share a concern for the welfare of humanity, dialogue is impossible, perhaps not worthwhile."* 91.

Knitter's current theological stance derives very much from his increasing interest in the proposals of liberation theologians and his conviction that there can and ought to be a natural affinity between liberationists and pluralists. An increased interchange of ideas between these two groups may be mutually sustaining and enriching; there can be a fruitful synthesis of ideas and concerns.

92. Latin American theologians of liberation need to become more aware of the liberative potential of non-Christian faiths, and need to espouse the cause of pluralism, he believes. This is because,

"...economic, political, and especially nuclear liberation is too big a job for any one nation or culture or religion. A crosscultural, interreligious cooperation in liberative praxis and a sharing of liberative theory is called for." 93.

Similarly, he believes pluralists have much to gain from an emphasis on liberative praxis, which, in focusing upon essentials, can function for pluralism as a preventative against the tendency for dialogue to be debilitated and reduced to relativist pap. 94. He outlines several reasons for holding this view. Firstly, he believes the approach of liberationists to dialogue, via what he calls the "hermeneutics of suspicion," helps to prevent those engaged in dialogue from interpreting scripture and doctrinal formulations in the light of their own interests, and as a means of promoting them.

He asks,

"...how much has traditional theology of religions, especially its christological basis, served to cloak or condone unconscious ideological desires to maintain superiority, or to dominate and control, or to devalue other traditions culturally or religiously? Why, really, have Christians been so insistent on maintaining the doctrine of extra ecclesiam nulla salus ["outside the church, no salvation"], or the claim that Christ has to be the final norm for all other religions?" 95.

Secondly, against those who argue that there is no common essence among religions, or shared starting point from which to engage in dialogue, liberative ideas provide a starting point or common context centred around *"...the preferential option for the poor and the non-person."* 96. Thirdly, a soteriocentric approach provides objective criteria by which religions may assess and judge themselves and each other, against the nuanced form of fideism which results from the claim that it is inappropriate to assess religions by criteria which are not meaningful within a given tradition. Unless we are prepared to undertake some form of assessing and grading religions, as attempted by Hick, we cannot escape from the pitfalls of radical scepticism or complete relativism. 97.

Clearly, in promoting a soteriocentric approach to dialogue, Knitter is asserting the primacy of praxis over theory. Indeed he states, *"...liberation theology insists that praxis is both the origin and the confirmation of theory or doctrine. All Christian beliefs and truth claims must grow out of and then be reconfirmed in the praxis or lived experience of these truths."* 98.

He has formulated an agenda of practical concerns which, he believes, are of such universal importance that they transcend differences of doctrinal belief and are able to provide a grounding for religious theory and a starting point for dialogue. He highlights three areas of global concern.

1. The Injustice of Socio-Economic Oppression

Knitter believes that the outrage and injustice of poverty and oppression, based on distinctions of race, class and sex, is consciously felt by the religions today in a new and unique way. The violations of human rights which manifest themselves as poverty, starvation, illiteracy and unemployment impinge upon our consciousness as never before, through an awareness brought about by mass communication. This is the first area of universal religious concern, the cause of social and economic justice. 99.

2. The Nuclear Threat

Knitter also believes there is a universal call for peace, which cannot be brought about without a radical change in our ways of thinking and being. This call for peace impinges on our consciousness as never before, since the threat of nuclear attack has awakened our awareness to the possibility of the mass destruction of humanity. 100.

3. The Need for Ecological Liberation

Thirdly, Knitter draws attention to the need for ecological liberation; in the post-industrial world we are becoming aware of the exploitation and potential destruction of the eco-system upon which we are all dependent. There is a universal human call to address this problem before it is too late. 101. These three issues constitute the areas of global concern, which, Knitter believes, provide an opportunity for the religions to encounter one another on a basis of shared interests. 102. Since formulating this agenda of shared ethical concerns, Knitter has extended his thesis in Jesus and the other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility and in One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility. He now calls for a "...correlational globally responsible theology of religions" within which dialogue between members of different religious communities can take place on a basis of absolute equality and mutual respect. 103. Against inclusivists, Knitter is insistent that useful dialogue can only take place if each participant is completely open to listening to, and learning from, the truth claims of others. This presupposes that one cannot engage in dialogue with the pre-conviction that Jesus is the full, final and

unsurpassable manifestation of God in history. Inclusivist theologians, he maintains, have failed to explain how this kind of Christological stance allows for a truly correlational dialogue.

"...It is one thing to enter the dialogue with solid truth claims; it is quite another to place on the table of dialogue truth claims that are stamped with the divine seal of approval as final and unsurpassable" 104.

The essence of Knitter's present stance, which underpins his theology of religions and facilitates truly open dialogue is that *"...a correlational dialogue has to presume that there can be, and most likely are, many true religions"*. 105. Contrary to the inclusivist position, he believes such a stance is not a denial of the particularity of Christian truth claims;

"...contrary to what is generally thought, in a correlational model for calling religions to dialogue, differences are maintained, recognized, cherished; they are not boiled away in order to create some kind of common religious soup". 106.

Thus, the notion of *"many true religions"* entails that the world's religious traditions share truth, but express truth, through the particularity of their historically and culturally conditioned doctrinal structures, very differently. Differences are seen as complementary rather than contradictory, however,

"...If the Buddhist is transformed into a person more at peace with himself and others through the image of no-self, and if the Christian is similarly transformed through her experience of being a new-self in Christ Jesus, the evident contradiction between no-self and new-self must, in some way, be complimentary; the Buddhist and Christian can speak and share, and be better off for doing so". 107.

Here, Knitter very much echoes the view of John Cobb, *"...the Buddhist could in principle acknowledge the reality of something worthy of trust and worship without abandoning the central insight that attachment blocks the way to enlightenment. And the Christian could come to see that*

real trust is not attachment in the Buddhist sense. Both would thereby have learned what is important to the other without abandoning their central concerns". 108. Both Knitter and Cobb have moved beyond the surface conflict of opposing doctrinal structures, to a deeper realisation of the complementary character of apparently conflicting truth claims, and, it would seem to a vision of the possibility of religious truth in a variety of religious contexts.

Dialogue continues to be viewed by Knitter as a moral imperative in the face of human need and human suffering; *"...the need surges forth, painfully and implacably, from the reality of pervasive and unnecessary both human and ecological". 109.* Although Knitter calls upon the religions to address these issues as an absolute moral priority in dialogue, the dialogue itself is not confined to "the religions". Humanists will experience it as the responsibility and calling they feel when they realise that evolution has reached a point where we must now play a key role. The entire evolutionary process on Earth will be impeded, or at least set back, unless we humans exercise our intelligence and our freedom responsibly and morally. (We shall see, in the final chapter, how such views are shared and endorsed by other theologians such as Kaufman, and secular humanists such as Reiman, who both place emphasis upon the issues of global concern which Knitter considers to be a priority, in inter-faith dialogue).

Many of the concerns outlined by Knitter are shared by Hans Küng in Global Responsibility - In Search of a New World Ethic. It is Küng's conviction that:

"...the one world in which we live has a chance of survival only if there is no longer any room in it for spheres of differing, contradictory and even antagonistic ethics. This one world needs one basic ethic. This one world society certainly does not need a unitary religion and a unitary ideology, but it does need some norms, values, ideals and goals to bring it together and to be binding on it." 110.

Küng also makes the important point that the religions of the world - as distinct from secular humanist ethics - have a unique role in grounding a universalist agenda of moral norms,

particularly in relation to world peace, for although it is undeniable that there can be morality without religion,

"...there is one thing that those who have no religion cannot do, even if in fact they want to accept unconditional moral norms for themselves: they cannot give a reason for the absoluteness and universality of ethical obligations. What remains uncertain is why I should follow such norms unconditionally. ie. in every case and everywhere - even where they run quite contrary to my interest. And why should everyone do this? ... Even a duty for humankind to survive can hardly be demonstrated conclusively in a rational way." 111.

Thus he cites the "categorical imperative" [Kant] for the grounding of a distinctively religious ethical code that is capable of obtaining a universal consensus.

Where Knitter goes one step further than Küng, however, towards a pluralist theology of religions based on ethical criteria, is in spelling out what he sees as the implications of certain ethical proposals, for christological understanding. Citing the work of Latin American liberation theologians such as Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo, Knitter states that the soteriocentric model for dialogue calls for a new interpretation of the person and teaching of Jesus. 112. The crucial questions we must ask ourselves, in interpreting Jesus, must centre upon what he himself believed was of ultimate importance. *"...The ultimate for Jesus is the Kingdom of God - that is, God in relation to the human condition in the world we live in, as distinct from God in relation to God's self."* 113. The implication is that Jesus himself is not to be understood in terms of any kind of "absolute" which may be undermined through the methodology of historical exegesis, he is not to be understood in terms of the traditional New Testament titles, nor as the Son of God. Jesus - who refused to be defined - must be understood in terms of what he himself believed to be of absolute importance, the concerns encapsulated in the symbol of the Kingdom of God. Hence, according to Knitter and the liberation theologians he cites, the Kingdom-centred hermeneutic has decisive

implications for the understanding of christology. 114. The claim is that a degree of understanding of what Jesus meant by "the Kingdom", a commitment to the creation of a new world based on justice and freedom from oppression in all its manifestations, is a prerequisite for an understanding of Jesus himself. Thus, Segundo writes,

"...human beings who are not ready to set up certain human values as criteria prior and superior to any specific religion are incapable of recognizing the significance and importance of Jesus." 115.

Within the framework of thinking pioneered by some liberation theologians and endorsed by Knitter, there is a call for a radical shift from christocentrism to soteriocentrism, [or what I have called anthropocentrism.] An understanding of what they believe to be Jesus' message and Jesus' priorities becomes prior to and determinative of, an understanding of Jesus himself. Stated simply by Knitter, *"...unless we first meet the God present in our neighbour, we will never recognize the God of Jesus."* 116.

In Jesus and the Other Names Knitter continues to cite the Latin American Theologians, Juan Segundo and Jon Sobrino, in support of the theological stance they have taken in emphasising the teaching of Jesus and its relevance to present day awareness of the facts of human suffering, above the status of the person of Jesus. 117. This theological stance, Knitter believes, is beginning to reverberate into the wider community of Christians;

...I think there is a growing awareness among many Christians of a discrepancy between their doctrine and their ethics - between the view of the other given by their beliefs and the conduct toward the other required by their ethics. It is a clash between orthodoxy right beliefs - and orthopraxy - right behaviour. 118.

Where such a clash exists, Knitter clearly suggests that orthopraxis must be the Christian's priority. Thus, Knitter has moved considerably further towards a pluralist theology of religions based on ethical criteria than Küng would be prepared to go; it is unlikely that Küng would

endorse Knitter's christological revision nor his radical emphasis on soteriology, for he has stated that,

"...the Christian community may allow itself to be persuaded to replace an ecclesio-centrism with a Christo-centrism or theocentrism... but they are hardly likely to take up some vague soteriocentrism. Practice should not be made the norm of theory undialectically and social questions expounded as the basis and centre of the theology of religions." 119.

The relationship between religious theory and practice is one we shall shortly need to examine in more detail, for Küng, here, provides us with no overwhelmingly convincing reason for the precedence of christocentrism over soteriocentrism - other than what is located, presumably, in ecclesiocentrism. Unfortunately for Küng, it has become increasingly impossible in the post-Enlightenment world, to answer the fundamental question, what grounds has the rational person for affirming his or her religious belief? - solely with recourse to the authority of the Church, or scriptural testimony. This is a matter we shall return to shortly, in the context of the interrelationship between post-Enlightenment liberal ethics and religious affirmations.

For the present, it is worth noting that the priorities of Knitter and others are echoed in a publication edited by Marcus Braybrooke, Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic. In his overview of the present day inter-faith movement he states,

"...to meet the contemporary challenge, the interfaith movement needs to become more practical. ..Religious people need to make clear that their commitment to the search for truth and the defence of human rights is stronger than their group loyalty - costly as this may be...the emphasis has to be on the search for a global ethic." 120.

The main purpose of Braybrooke's book is to assemble the texts of declarations made by international bodies within the interfaith movement and to examine what kind of consensus may

be emerging among the world faiths on shared ethical values, despite doctrinal differences. Undoubtedly, an examination of the declarations made by five World Conferences on Religion and Peace held between 1970 and 1989 reveals that there is considerable consensus where the practical issues of the promotion of world peace and care for the ecological welfare of the planet are concerned. ¹²¹. There is also considerable agreement as regards the fundamental importance of human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and affirmed within all the major religious traditions. Article 1 of the U.N. declaration affirms that, *"...all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and shall act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."* ¹²². Clearly, however, the history of international and interfaith conflict since 1948 reveals an immense gulf between the ideology expressed in this statement, and its practical application in human affairs. The existence of this gulf is indisputable; its existence poses several questions which it will be expedient to examine separately, although they are intrinsically interconnected.

1. Do the religions actually mean the same thing when they speak of universal human rights and human liberation, or are such notions "tradition specific"?
2. Is it possible to ground morality in universal human reason, or is the level of generality expressed in such ideas as "universal human rights" so great as to be morally vacuous and conceptually meaningless?
3. Does the level of generality reflect the fact that in affirming this statement, the religions are influenced primarily by post-Enlightenment liberal ethics rather than by the specific beliefs and concerns of their own traditions? Are we seeing here, an unacceptable attempt to ground theory in praxis, rather than the reverse?

These are the vitally important issues which will come under examination in our final chapter.

CHAPTER 6 NOTES.

- 1 . J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. London. Macmillan. 1985. Chapter 5. See also, Religious Studies vol.xv111. [1982.]
- 2 . J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.86.
- 3 . P.Knitter. "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions" in The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1989. p.180. Also, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads". eds. H.Küng and J.Moltmann. Concilium 183. Edinburgh. T.& T.Clark. 1986. p.104.
- 4 . A.Pieris. "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology" in Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology. eds. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1983. pp.113-114. Also in A.Pieris. An Asian Theology of Liberation. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1988. p.87.
- 5 . J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. London Macmillan. 1989. p.360.
- 6 . The publication of God and the Universe of Faiths in 1973, marks Hick's first advocacy of a mythological interpretation of doctrine of the Incarnation.
- 7 . J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.69.
- 8 . J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.69. An Interpretation of Religion. p.309.
- 9 . J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.81. An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
10. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.67. An Interpretation of Religion. p.299.
11. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.79.
12. ibid. p.78.
13. ibid. p.75.
14. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.312.
15. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.78.
16. ibid. p.71.
17. J.Hick. Philosophy of Religion. [3rd edn.] pp.107-108. Also, Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.71.
18. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.73.

19. *ibid.* p.73.
20. *ibid.* p.74.
21. *ibid.* p.79.
22. *ibid.* pp.79-80.
23. *ibid.* p.81.
24. *ibid.* p.80.
25. *ibid.* p.80. Also, An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
26. *ibid.* p.81.
27. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.81-83. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.316-325.
28. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.301.
29. *ibid.* p.307.
30. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.79.
31. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.327.
32. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. pp.86-87.
33. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.340.
34. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.73.
35. *ibid.* pp.73-74.
36. J.Hick. "Christian Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue", in World Faiths. no. 103. 1977.
pp.2-19.
37. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret. Michigan. W.B.Eerdmanns.1978. pp.185-188.
38. *ibid.* p.190.
39. L.Newbigin. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. London. S.P.C.K. 1989. p.57.
40. L.Newbigin. The Open Secret. pp.95-96.
41. See Chapter 2 of this thesis.
42. G.D'Costa. "Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The doomed quest for a neutral vantage point from which to judge religions." Rel.Studies 29. 1993. pp.79-95.
43. *ibid.* p.81.
44. *ibid.* p.81 & p.95.

45. *ibid.* p.79.
46. J.Hick. Problems of Religious Pluralism. p.73.
47. Particularly in "Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality." ed.G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1990. pp.16-29.
48. G.A.Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine - Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age. London. S.P.C.K. 1984. p.49.
49. G.D'Costa. John Hick's Theology of Religions. A Critical Evaluation. University Press of America. 1986. p.181.
50. W.Pannenberg. "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims" in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. Maryknoll. New York. 1990. p.102.
51. G.A.Lindbeck. The Nature of Doctrine - Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age. p.49.
52. D.Tracy. "Plurality and Ambiguity": Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope. New York. Harper Row. 1987. p.90.
53. P.Almond. "John Hick's Copernican Theology." Theology 86.1983. pp.36-41.
54. J.A.DiNoia. The Diversity of Religions. A Christian Perspective. Washington D.C. Catholic University of America Press. 1992.
55. J.Hick. "Religious Diversity as Challenge and Promise." in eds. J.Hick and H.Askari. The Experience of Religious Diversity. Aldershot. England. Brookfield. Vermont. Gower. 1985. pp.20-21.
56. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.247.
57. J.Hick. God has Many Names. p.38.
58. J.A.DiNoia. The Diversity of Religions. p.63.
59. *ibid.* p.75.
60. *ibid.* p.91.
61. *ibid.* p.92.
62. P.Knitter. "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions." ed. J.Hick & P.Knitter. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. London. S.C.M. 1988. p.185.

63. J.Milbank. "The End of Dialogue" in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. ed. G.D'Costa. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1990. pp.176-178.
64. ibid. pp.177-178.
65. ibid. p.175.
66. Many theologians who reject religious pluralism nevertheless strongly advocate interreligious dialogue. See, G.D'Costa. Theology and Religious Pluralism. A.Camps. Partners in Dialogue - Christianity and Other Religions. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1983. J.Cobb. "Beyond Pluralism" in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. P.J.Griffiths. An Apology for Apologetics. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1991. Inter-Religious dialogue, as we have seen, is rejected by Milbank in "The End of Dialogue", also in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered.
67. G.Kaufman. The Theological Imagination. Constructing the Concept of God. Philadelphia. Westminster Press. 1981. pp.197-199. Also, A.Pieris. "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology" in eds. V.Fabella and S.Torres. Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1983. pp.113-139.
68. P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation. Foundations for a Pluralist Theology of Religions. Madison. New Jersey. Drew Gateway. 1988. p.26.
69. ibid. pp.28-30.
70. P.J.Griffiths, in An Apology for Apologetics suggests that pluralists such as Hick, [or universalist perspectivalists, as he calls them] adopt their theological positions in order to promote world harmony,
- "...if everyone becomes convinced of the truth of this position, then missionaries will pack their bags, Jews, Muslims and Christians will stop fighting one another in the Middle East, Buddhists and Hindus will stop fighting one another in Sri Lanka and the world will become a much happier and more habitable place."* [Griffiths. p.48.]

However, this judgement of Hick's adoption of religious pluralism is very simplistic and is refuted by Hick's own justification for taking such a stance, which is rooted in his philosophy of the nature of religious belief based on the veridical character of religious experience.

"...The kind of rational justification...for treating one's own form of religious experience as a cognitive response - though always a complexly conditioned one - to a divine reality...must...apply equally to the religious experience of others...let us avoid the implausibly arbitrary dogma that religious experience is all delusory with the single exception of the particular form enjoyed by the one who is speaking." [An Interpretation of Religion. p.235.]

71. A.Camps and G.D'Costa, among others, uphold a Christocentric approach to inter-faith dialogue.
72. G.D'Costa. "Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality?" Rel.Studies. 29. C.U.P. 1993. p.93.
73. H.Netland. Dissonant Voices. Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth. Leicester. Apollos. Michigan. W.B.Eerdmanns. 1991. pp.159-160.
74. *ibid.* p.161.
75. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.376.
76. J.Cobb, although writing in opposition to pluralism, nevertheless makes some similar points.
See, "Beyond Dialogue" p.93.in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. Orbis. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1992.
77. H.Netland. Dissonant Voices. p.112.
78. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. Quoted in Netland. p.229.
79. H.Netland. Dissonant Voices. p.233.
80. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. pp.369-370.
81. *ibid.* p.369.
82. An example of a theologian who holds a "non-Realist" view of morality is D.Cupitt. The New Christian Ethics. London. S.C.M. 1988 and Explorations in Theology 6. London.

- S.C.M. 1979. In the sphere of moral philosophy, these views are shared by J.L.Mackie, Ethics - Inventing Right and Wrong. New York. Penguin. 1977. and by B.Russell, Human Society in Ethics and Politics. London. Allen and Unwin. 1954. Against this, and in support of moral realism, see R.Swinburne, "The Objectivity of Morality", Philosophy 51. 1976.
- Also, F.H.Bradley, Ethical Studies. [2nd edn.] Oxford. 1927, D.O.Brink, Moral Realism and the Foundation of Ethics. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1989, and Renford Bambrough, Moral Scepticism and Moral Knowledge. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1979.
83. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.305.
84. *ibid.* p.304.
85. *ibid.* p.306.
86. G.D'Costa. "Whose Objectivity? Which Morality?" Rel. Studies. 29. C.U.P. 1993. pp.79-95, in criticism of K.Ward. A Vision to Pursue. Beyond the Crisis in Christianity. London. S.C.M. 1991.
87. G.D'Costa. "The Reign of God and Trinitarian Ecclesiology. An Analysis of Soteriocentrism," in eds. P.Mojzes and L.Swidler. Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue. Religions in Dialogue. vol.4. Edwin Mellen Press. p.57. 88. P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation: Foundations for a Pluralist Theology of Religions. Madison, New Jersey. Drew Gateway. 1988. p.18.
89. P.Knitter. No Other Name? London. S.C.M. 1985. p.143.
90. P.Knitter. "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions." eds. J.Hick and P.Knitter. The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. London. S.C.M. 1988. p.187. Also, "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads." eds. H.Küng and J.Moltmann. Christianity among World Religions. Concilium 183. p.105.
91. P.Knitter. "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads." p.105.
92. P.Knitter. "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions." pp.178-181.
93. *ibid.* p.179.
94. *ibid.* p.181.
95. *ibid.* p.182.

96. *ibid.* p.185.
97. *ibid.* p.188.
98. P.Knitter. "Catholic Theology of Religions at a Crossroads." p.105.
99. P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation. Foundations for a Pluralist Theology of Religions. p.18.
100. *ibid.* p.19.
101. *ibid.* p.20.
102. *ibid.*
103. P.Knitter. Jesus and the Other Names. Christian Mission and Global Responsibility.
Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1996. p.24
104. *ibid.* p.62
105. *ibid.* p.24
106. *ibid.*
107. *ibid.* p.25
108. J.Cobb. "Beyond Pluralism" in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered.
Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1990. p.93
109. P.Knitter. Jesus and the Other Names. p.26. He describes the reality of such suffering, and the moral imperative attendant upon it, in One Earth, Many Religions; Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1995, especially in chapters 4 and 5.
110. H.Küng. Global Responsibility - In Search of a New World Ethic. London. S.C.M. and Crossroad. 1991. p.xv1.
111. *ibid.* pp.51-52.
112. P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation. pp.38-41.
113. J.Sobrino. Jesus in Latin America. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1987. Quoted in P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation. p.34.
114. P.Knitter. Dialogue and Liberation. pp.33-36.
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CHAPTER 7

Ethical Criteria for a Global Theology of Religions

At the end of the last chapter several interrelated questions were posed, which it will be vital to answer satisfactorily, if the proposal for inter-faith dialogue within a pluralist framework on the basis of an acknowledgement of shared ethical concerns is to be seen to be viable. To recap, objections to such a proposal centre upon the fact that such notions as "human rights" and "human liberation" are too generalized; the religions, it is claimed, circumscribe their world and their understanding of what it is to be human. Given the incommensurability of the faiths' understanding of the human condition, there is no universally acceptable platform from which agreement upon ethical issues can be reached.

Such a stance implies a rejection of the idea that morality is grounded in human reason; according to such critics, our notions of what is moral are themselves tradition specific; there is no such thing as "moral realism", outside of the faiths' understanding of morality, and beyond the historical and cultural conditioning of societies' views upon such issues. Attempts to ground notions of what is moral in "universal human reason" are thus doomed to failure. Furthermore, in relation to the religions, ideas associated with modern liberalism tend to minimize the fundamental tenets of traditions in their paradigmatic and normative forms, thus there is an unwarrantable intrusion upon the religions, of ill-defined post-enlightenment liberal ethics. These, in brief, are the issues I shall address in this final chapter.

The Meaning of Human Rights and Human Liberation within the Religions.

In Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic Braybrooke cites the teachings of the world faiths in support of the view that the idea of human rights is to be found in all the major faiths. 1. This is in alignment with Hick's belief that, "...love, compassion, generous concern for and commitment to

the welfare of others is a central ideal for each of them." [the religions.] 2. Hick further defines this commitment, and centres it anthropocentrically, by stating that,

"...the basic ethical principle of the great traditions - is not an alien ideal imposed by supernatural authority but one arising out of our human nature [though always in tension with other aspects of that nature], reinforced, refined and elevated to new levels within the religious traditions." 3.

Against this, it has been argued that there is in reality no theoretical basis of commonality in the idea of human rights among the faiths, and that the term is itself ill-defined and deeply ambiguous. "Human Rights" can only be grounded in the underlying understanding within the faiths of what it is to be human. Beliefs regarding issues of practical human rights are dependent on, and must be rooted in, the theoretical bases of faiths, ie. in their truth claims, grounded in what they believe actually constitutes human nature in relation to the divine nature. 4.

In reply to this it could be argued, however, that theoretical support for human rights is inseparable from the practical issues which constitute the essential concerns of religions, for, in talking about human rights, we are by definition talking about what is right for humans. Therefore we are talking about practical matters. For this reason, any attempt to assert the primacy of theory over practice is neither possible nor desirable. Clearly, there is ample evidence that the grounding of praxis in theory has not always borne fruit, for religions have frequently failed to promote the ideals they support theoretically in an active and purposeful way. 5.

The existence of an immense gulf between religious ideals and religious practice is undeniable and its existence points to the failure of religions to produce what Hick has called "the fruits of the spirit" commensurate with their theoretical ideals. Since this is true, it is not easy to be convinced by the argument of John Milbank, that; *"...a postmodern position that respects otherness and*

locality, and yet at the same time still seeks the goals of justice, peace and reconciliation, can only, in fact, be a Christian [or possibly a Jewish] position." 6.

Milbank seems to believe that the post-Enlightenment liberal perspective is, in its origins, intrinsically associated with a Jewish/Christian inheritance, and therefore ought not to be "transplanted" to the context of Eastern religions; any attempt to do so is to reinforce the kind of imperialism and ethnocentricity so much deplored by pluralists. However, Milbank himself may be accused of ethnocentricity in his suggestion that concerns with justice, equality and freedom are "evidently Western" and in what seems to be his refusal to allow the religions to develop as they wish, in dialogue with modernity. 7. According to Milbank, traditions - and here I use the term with deliberation since he does not concede that there is any such genus as "religions" - are best understood by reading *"dead texts pre-dating Western intrusion and practices relatively uncontaminated by Western influence."* 8. This is because living representatives of traditions are, according to Milbank, inevitably influenced by the West to the extent that they cannot be said to be truly representative of their traditions at all, their very willingness to engage in dialogue with the West indicates alienation from their roots. 9.

The implication of this is that Milbank, rather than the religious representatives themselves, would be the arbiter and decision maker in the matter of how far the religions may be allowed to develop as they wish in dialogue with modernity. In this way, Milbank himself may be accused of ethnocentricity, in displaying an attitude which consigns the religions to the status of historical phenomena, by denying their relevance to the modern context and their ability to develop within it. Milbank holds a sceptical view of the usefulness of inter-faith dialogue, based on his belief in the basic incommensurability of faith traditions. He believes that,

"...it must be sheerly illusory to associate evidently Western concerns with social justice, social equality and the freedom of the Other ...with a tradition-transcending pluralism...this association implies that one can find justice and freedom in universal human reason." 10.

According to Milbank, the *"now general realization of the literate"* is that this is impossible. 11.

It is precisely this issue that we need to examine more closely in the next section, for Milbank's assertion has far-reaching consequences. If he is right, and moral principles cannot be founded in human reason, it is very questionable whether they can be subjected to human reason as a means of scrutinizing them either. And if this is so, it must indeed be the case that inter-faith dialogue based on the search for common ethical criteria is a fruitless exercise, for only reason can show us that the conflict between persons who hold opposing moral views is in fact a relationship between one who is correct in his or her moral beliefs and one who is mistaken. The problem with Milbank's thesis is that, even if he is correct in his stance that moral principles such as justice are rooted in the Jewish/Christian tradition, and cannot be transplanted to other traditions, we can in fact have no way of judging whether this is so or otherwise, if we reject human reason as a means of scrutinizing this issue. The claim that any tradition [for example, Hinduism] is devoid of any moral principle founded on reason, [for example, justice] is dependent on some other argument based on human reason, which is capable of sustaining the claim. I shall argue, however, that Milbank is mistaken, and that it is by no means the case that "the literate" acknowledge the impossibility of founding justice in human reason. I shall not attempt the task of demonstrating that any specific moral ideal, such as justice, is equally and commensurably present in the religions, but rather, the alternative task of demonstrating that it would in fact be impossible for Milbank, or anyone else, to substantiate the assertion that justice or any other principle is not found in the traditions in their "authentic" and "uncontaminated" forms, without recourse to human reason in some form, to ground such an assertion. It is necessary to demonstrate that moral ideals can be founded in and scrutinized by human reason, in order that, in inter-faith dialogue, the religions may be able to thresh out precisely how far, in what ways, and with what degree of commensurability, these ideals do in fact appear in the faiths.

It is worth noting that several other theologians hold what we may consider to be rather more optimistic views regarding both the present affirmation of the importance of human rights among

the religions, and the potential of this sphere as a future meeting point among them. It is the view of R. Traer that,

"...it is clear that among those who affirm human rights there is considerable agreement as to both the fundamental importance of human rights in the modern world and the content of human rights...faith in human rights is not merely international but interreligious." 12.

The Latin American theologian, Jon Sobrino is in agreement that we may discern a nucleus of liberating capacity in the sacred scriptures of all the major faiths, although he believes that this central issue must be given greater emphasis in the world we live in today.

"...By reason of their sacred writings and history, the Abrahamic religions can claim an essential liberating capacity. This is certainly clear in Christianity and Judaism, at least in its Old Testament form, but also in Islam, as modern Muslim exegesis attests...In India I heard an exegesis of certain sacred Scriptures of Asian religions in which social criticism and the ideal means for social transformation, that is, liberation, are central. Without wishing to overgeneralize, I believe that liberation is central to the sacred writings of the religions, although in different forms and degrees, and is something that we must affirm and emphasize nowadays." 13.

Sobrino gives substance to the meaning of "human liberation" by his definition of the idea as,

"...that which frees the poor from the proximity of death and encourages them to live...from a religious perspective...liberation is more than freedom from socioeconomic oppression; but we cannot call a religion liberating, in today's world, unless, in some way, it fosters this kind of liberation." 14.

William Burrows also views the concern for human rights as a futuristic possibility for a meeting point among the faiths, rather than a present reality. Burrows distances himself from the Christian orthodoxy / post-Enlightenment debate and the attendant issues related to orthodoxy and orthopraxy by adopting a different stance towards the derivation of such concerns. He suggests that the primacy and emphasis accorded to human rights by liberation theologians constitutes a fairly radical reappraisal within the religious traditions of their central preoccupations. ¹⁵ He states that, historically, the faiths have not demonstrated an overriding concern to redress the structural ills of society, which is in alignment with Hick's belief that it would be anachronistic to suppose that Christianity or any other tradition should have sought to overturn social orders that, in the historical situations in which they have developed, seemed to be fixed and immutable. For this reason, Burrows is probably right in stating that a preoccupation with human liberation, as a future goal of the religions, *"says more about the openness of the great traditions to radical reinterpretation and reorientation than it does about liberation as a central motif in their classical constitution."* ¹⁶ This is not to say, however, that the notion of human liberation is incommensurable within the spectrum of religions, for, "the very fact that we are able to discuss the issue in some sort of logical fashion reveals a basis for comparison and, therefore, commensurability. ¹⁷ How far these theologians are justified in believing that it is possible to give greater definition to the ideas of liberation and human rights, and therefore to examine more explicitly their commensurability within the faiths, we will discuss in the next section.

2. The level of generality expressed in the ideas of "Human Rights" and "Universal Moral Principles". links between Religious and Secular Moral Philosophy.

To recap, the suggestion has been that the level of generality expressed in the ideas of "human rights", and "universal moral principles" is so great that the ideas themselves are rendered morally vacuous. We should have no hesitation, I believe, in making some concessions to this point, but what is interesting is why this should be so. That there should be a high level of generality in far-reaching statements of human morality is a function of their absolute character and universal

application. Certainly, it must be conceded that it is when we move from the general to the particular that problems arise. To use a simple example from individual morality, it is easy to obtain a consensus about the sanctity of human life; the moral principle "thou shalt not kill" is accepted by the world faiths and by secular humanists alike and is usually enshrined in human law. It is true that theoretical and general moral principles of this kind often fail to arouse strong feelings of moral approbation or disapprobation, for they seem to be so obvious as to be morally vacuous. It is when we apply them to specific contemporary issues that they are found to be of little value; our supposed "universal agreement" rapidly disintegrates in the face of human dilemmas concerning abortion, voluntary euthanasia, killing in wartime and a host of issues centring on modern medical technology, with which we have only just begun to be confronted. Why should this be so? The answer must in part lie in the fact that the world faiths, growing up in particular historical and cultural conditions, are simply not able to provide us with easy and obvious solutions to the particular moral problems with which we are faced today. Where Christianity is concerned, this problem is emphasized by Jesus' own eschatology, which strongly suggests that he, and the disciples who followed him, were in imminent expectation of the ending of the world order as it then existed. As Albert Schweitzer has written, in relation to Christian ethics;

"...The ideal would be that Jesus should have preached religious truth in a form independent with any connection with any particular period and such that it could be taken over simply and easily by each succeeding generation of men. That, however, he did not do, and no doubt there is a reason for it. We have, therefore, to reconcile ourselves to the fact that his religion of love appeared as part of a world-view which expected a speedy end of the world. Clothed in the ideas in which he announced it, we cannot make it our own." 18.

Here, Schweitzer states very forcibly the problem associated with what appears to have been Jesus' eschatology. Paradoxically, however, this need not imply the redundancy of what Hick has called

the "Golden Rule" as a general principle, provided it is clearly understood as being only a starting point. Far from being vacuous or insignificant, Hick believes the general principle of goodwill, compassion and concern for others is morally unassailable and, if adhered to, would have overwhelmingly significant consequences. He writes of,

"...the utterly basic principle that it is evil to cause suffering to others and good to benefit others and to alleviate or prevent their sufferings. This is so fundamental and universally accepted a principle that it is seldom formulated. And yet if all human beings lived in accordance with it, there would be no wars, no injustice, no crime, no needless suffering." 19.

There would be nothing insignificant or vacuous about the consequences of a universal commitment to moral principles. But what is clearly essential, given the reality of a lapse of almost two thousand years since the historical life of Jesus, and similar or greater time lapses since the foundation of other faiths, is an absolute moral obligation to use very human endeavour to apply basic principles to present day circumstances and present day moral issues, in the knowledge that fundamental principles are only a starting point, and that there is a clear need to redefine moral principles in the modern context. Hick also reminds us that,

"...The love commandment of the Sermon on the Mount by itself, without the insistent prompting of humanist and rationalist voices, did not end slavery and has not ended exploitation." 20.

He reminds us that Christianity cannot be credited with the achievement of a general trend towards a more just and egalitarian world, outside the context of the wider human endeavour towards this, associated with the notion of "modern liberal ethics." For this reason, it seems by no means inappropriate for the religions to draw upon the insights of modern moral philosophy in their quest to establish common ethical principles. In a religiously plural world, the increasing awareness of the traditions of each others' moral values has inevitably weakened the constraints of historical ignorance, nor, if the religions wish to claim relevance for their particular world-views, should they distance themselves from dialogue with modernity. The idea I wish to explore, in dialogue

with moral philosophy, is that it is by no means the case that it is impossible to found the ideals of freedom and justice in universal human reason, and that the insights of moral philosophy may be valuable in redefining and clarifying traditional religious perspectives. This will be done with reference to recent contributions to religious and moral philosophy, by Jeffrey Reiman and Gordon Kaufman. Equally, it will be necessary to examine the very influential views of those who refute the notion of grounding morality in human reason; here I will examine specifically the more recent work of Alasdair MacIntyre. If it is possible to establish a viable argument for the existence of a realist moral philosophy, this will provide a means of refuting Milbank's belief, as stated above, that it is impossible to ground morality in human reason and that inter-faith dialogue on such issues is a fruitless exercise. [It will not answer the question of how far moral ideals such as justice do in fact exist in the religions, or how far they are commensurable, but if successful, it will demonstrate the usefulness of continued inter-faith dialogue as regards these issues.]

In examining the work of both Reiman and Kaufman, one may discern a continuum of the monumental influence of Kantian ethics in illuminating the significance of persons as free moral agents. Kaufman emphasises this point in his recent work, In Face of Mystery; A Constructive Theology in the context of the relationship between individual and collective ethics;

"...persons - as free and responsible agents and thus in important respects self-determining and with projects of their own - should never be dealt with as mere "things", mere instruments for the purpose of others; they are always entitled to special respect." 21.

Further he writes,

"...But we are truly free and responsible [that is, agents] only to the extent and in the respect that we legislate for ourselves truly universal laws, and act in accordance with those laws; that is only as we take responsibility for universal concerns, not merely our own interests or desires." 22.

Kaufman places emphasis upon the concept of justice as a profoundly basic and absolute principle that functions within our linguistic structure as an "idealizing symbol." The major task of his most recent theological enterprise [which is, however, very much an extension and elaboration of his earlier thinking] is to attempt to give an historicist reconstruction to certain religious/linguistic symbols which, he believes, have become irrelevant and meaningless to persons as they find themselves in their present context. Within Kaufman's thinking, the symbols of Truth, Justice, Equality and Freedom are grouped together with the symbol of God, as those which, within our culture, have given value and meaning to our lives, despite our awareness of the limitation and inadequacy of the linguistic structure themselves to encapsulate the fullness of the underlying concepts. 23. However, Kaufman believes that in the modern era, many people have become alienated from the symbolic concept of God; he questions what the concept itself can mean to people, in the light of intense suffering, both human and ecological, for, with liberation theologians, he acknowledges that Christian and other religious communities have been responsible for much of this suffering. Human alienation from the concept of God is explicable, in the light of this suffering, therefore, a reconstruction of Christian concepts is a vital necessity, if they are to be retrieved from a pit of meaninglessness. His work is a construction of Christian theology as an imaginative construction, for he believes human creativity and imaginative thought processes play an integral part in the theological enterprise, because ultimately, the meaning of human life is beyond our comprehension and the focus of the study, God, is profound mystery. This approach to theology is in marked contrast with the conception of theology as the exposition of doctrine deriving from authoritative sources, and may certainly be considered an anthropological approach.

In many respects, this most recent contribution to theological thinking in relation to ethical concepts such as that of justice is in alignment with Jeffrey Reiman's work on this issue, in Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy. Reiman holds a naturalistic world-view, but also emphasises the centrality of the concept of justice, rooted in the notion of the non-subjugation of persons and in alignment with Kant's view of the universality of the moral imperative. 24. Reiman outlines a theory which views the notion of justice as a fundamental moral principle underpinning a realist

conception of justice. This is commensurate with the social contract theory of justice in moral philosophy, which has developed from Hobbes and Locke, to Kant, Rawls and beyond. The social contract theory of justice, in its suggestion that there are moral demands arising from this hypothetical contract which are rationally binding on all, is capable, according to Reiman, of overcoming the doubts of those who deny the possibility of establishing any moral principles as true and valid beyond reasonable doubt. 25.

Reiman believes the crucial problem for moral philosophy is to distinguish between might and right; to demonstrate that certain moral judgements should override others, not simply because they are able to do so, through sheer force of numbers or strength of conviction, but because they are rooted in a basis of rationality which entails that they ought to do so. The principle of justice is viewed by Reiman as the fundamental moral principle by which we are able to identify and therefore eliminate the threat of subjugation of the individual. Subjugation is the term he uses *"to characterize any case in which the judgement of one person prevails over the contrary judgement of another simply because it can and thus without adequate justification for believing that it should."* 26. Justice is singled out by Reiman as the fundamental moral principle, having primacy over all others, not because it is a "higher" moral ideal but because it functions to determine what is permissible or impermissible in relation to other moral beliefs; *"its task is to determine the things that can be done in the name of other moral beliefs...justice polices the border between might and right."* 27.

If the principle of justice is attained by eliminating the conditions of subjugation, we must, according to Reiman, turn to reason as the only means available to us to refute the suspicion of subjugation, for reason is an absolute requirement for us to arrive at knowledge of the conditions of subjugation and thereby to eliminate them. Therefore, the fate of justice is dependent on the authority which derives from human reason. 28. Reiman is aware of the challenges made to this concept of reason in twentieth century philosophy, but responds that, if we reject reason as a means of distinguishing what we should believe from what we do believe, there is simply no other means available to us, and we are pushed into the unsatisfactory position of conceding that what

we do believe derives from faith or feeling, custom or convention, intuition or mere whim. 29. For many people, this is an intellectually unsatisfactory position; it requires that we should not easily dismiss the task of seeking to ground morality in reason. If we value the moral principle of justice as the antithesis of subjugation, we are obliged to concede that the fate of justice is dependent on the authority which only derives from reason.

Only reason gives us the requirements of justice, not just formally but substantively. The formal requirement is rooted in the principle of universalizability, that if I state that something is true and valid in one situation, I must, to avoid logical contradiction, affirm that it is true and valid in analogously similar situations. However, this is insufficient as a moral requirement; it is merely a logical requirement rooted in the principle of non-contradiction. A person who asserts that a bachelor is a married man violates the principle of non-contradiction, but we would not thereby call him or her an unjust person in any sense, and certainly not in the sense that we would call a murderer or a rapist an unjust person. Something more fundamental than a logical requirement is called for, to ground a moral requirement. The substantive approach must be grounded in an acceptance of some fact or facts whose very nature implies that justice is an absolute and universal requirement. Reiman singles out the facts of human subjectivity, the fact that human beings care about their lives and the conditions of them in an absolute and ultimate way [what Tillich would call "ultimate concern"] to ground the absolute requirement of justice. He affirms the absolute status of human subjectivity;

"...what it is like to be a subject is to occupy, in the first person, a practical partisan attitude. A subject does not just have this attitude. Subjectivity is the inhabiting of that attitude. It occurs and can only be grasped in the first person. Accordingly, to know subjectivities other than one's own, observation alone will not do. One must identify with them." 30.

To identify with human subjectivity requires more than empathy, it is an act of cognitive choice. The link between the act of cognitive choice and its grounding in reason is the notion of

maximizing coherence by rational thought, which Reiman attributes to Gilbert Harman. 31. In order to maximize the coherence of his or her beliefs about the world, the rational thinker recognizes that other human subjects have identical concerns about the conditions of their lives as he or she has, and this recognition can only be brought about by identifying with them. 32. In this way,

"...reason is brought to see what I think is the simple truth of morality - namely, that the fact that human beings care about their mortal lives in the way that they do is reason enough to allow them, each and all, to make the best of them. Recognizing this truth is discovering that reason requires human beings to refrain from subjugating one another." 33.

The theses of Kaufman and Reiman differ in that one derives from a "religious" and one from a "secular" world-view, however, they are in fundamental agreement in several respects. Firstly, they are rooted in a Kantian philosophical framework which underlines the universality of a principle such as justice and claims that it is grounded in human reason. Secondly, they view the concept of justice as an absolute moral principle which emphasises individualism rather than collectivism. However, implicit in this realist view of morality is a commitment to the belief that human beings are capable of transcending the limitations of particularist societal allegiances; cognition and morality are in some sense autonomous and human beings are capable of formulating and abiding by principles that have universal application beyond what is specific to particular traditions. Hence, a wedge is driven between the apparently opposing theses of individualism and collectivism.

In these respect they provide an alternative to the views of those who in recent times have argued that morality itself is "tradition specific" and that the present state of moral disorder is attributable to the modern emphasis upon individual rather than collective rights, when, in reality no such rights can be discerned with recourse to universal human reason. A formidable proponent of this view is Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory, and in his more recent work, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? It is MacIntyre's contention that it is erroneous to view

the self as a free-floating agent, outside specific social contexts, and that the modern view of "self" is peculiarly the product of a process of historical and cultural transformation, that can be traced back to the failure of the Enlightenment project to justify morality in human reason. It is his belief that the central characteristics of modern society are individualism and collectivism: these characteristics are, superficially, in tension with one another, but, ultimately and paradoxically, are also mutually sustaining, for the so-called "freedom" of individual behaviour is enmeshed in a web of bureaucratic controls. Ultimately, according to MacIntyre, a view of morality which purports to be rooted in human autonomy and human individualism is as tradition-specific as any other.

According to MacIntyre's thesis in After Virtue, key episodes in the social history of Europe, specifically, the Enlightenment, have contributed to a process of historical transformation which has culminated in the present situation in which "emotivism" has emerged as the dominant moral norm. He claims that emotivism asserts that, *"...there are and can be no valid rational justification for any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards."* 34. The Enlightenment project of justifying morality in human rationality, which MacIntyre associates with Kiergaard, Kant, Diderot and Hume, was, he claims, as tradition specific as any other. Despite its rejection of Christian theology, it was rooted in a teleological framework in which God, freedom and happiness as the culmination of virtue was, pervasively, the norm of the moral environment. Given that this was a particular moral environment, as historically and culturally specific as any other, the Enlightenment project must inevitably fail, for there are no "timeless truths of reason."

By contrast, Kaufman, for whom the acknowledgement of historical and contextual significance in all philosophical thinking is axiomatic, nevertheless sees far greater potential in Kantian ethics for transcending contextual constraints. He believes Kant himself was acutely aware of the historical process in which religious and societal institutions are created, but believed his own time

was a critical period, a "coming of age" in terms of human self-awareness of the nature and potential of individual freedom and responsibility. It is Kaufman's belief that,

"...it is possible, thus, to connect his [Kant's] views directly with a historicistic understanding of moral responsibility and freedom... an understanding in which the essential priority of history and society over the individual is recognized, but in which it is also recognized that the flowering of human history is to be seen in the emergence of free and responsible women and men in well-ordered communities of peace and justice." 35.

MacIntyre, however, rejects the central thrust of Kant's thinking, which is to view morality as grounded in human reason, autonomous, and the basis for the postulation of God's existence. For MacIntyre, misguided notions of human freedom are characteristic of the moral climate of modern society, in which the moral agent sees himself or herself as freed from the constraints of realising his or her "telos" within a hierarchical structure. Hence the emergence of the individual who believes himself or herself to be autonomous in moral authority, the "emotivist" self. The deep disorder of the language and practice of morality is, he believes, attributable to the modern individualistic view of self; moral utterances and moral practices are rootless in modern society. 36.

In After Virtue his claim is that the unity of selfhood is best understood within the concept of a personal narrative, embedded within the context of defined social roles which give moral particularity to the individual quest for the good life.

"...we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation... these constitute the given of my life, my

*moral starting point. this is in part what gives my life its own
moral particularity." 37.*

His claim is that, *"...this thought is likely to appear alien and even surprising from the standpoint of modern individualism. From the standpoint of modern individualism I am what I myself choose to be."* 38.

MacIntyre's suggestion seems to be that the notion of moral autonomy within a social structure which emphasises the priority of the individual presupposes acceptance of the view that there are, and can be, no objective moral standards. This is not necessarily so. In creating a sharp dichotomy between the "emotivist self" and the "narrative self" he oversimplifies what may actually occur when persons make moral judgements. Persons who see themselves as free moral agents do not necessarily see themselves as thereby detached from the social roles and character traits that are embedded in the concept of a "narrative self", indeed, they may acknowledge that personhood and identity are intrinsically bound up with such matters. In modern society the individual, while seeing himself or herself as able to exercise choice in moral judgements, may attempt to choose on the basis that morality must be rational, impartial, and must conform to the principle of non-subjugation of persons, so that a fair and consistent social order of morality could, at least in theory, eventually emerge. It is MacIntyre's view that "the form of moral utterance provides a mask for almost any face." 39. This verges on a parody of what issues are involved in making moral choices. He gives examples of contemporary moral disagreements, such as that which exists between the committed pacifist and his or her moral opponent, who would argue that in order to avoid war it is essential to deter aggressors with the threat of violent action, and, if necessary, be prepared to wage war on a scale which can have no predetermined limits. 40. Despite their opposing views it may be very far from true to say that the pacifist and the non-pacifist are involved in making moral choices on the basis of emotivism, as defined by him. Neither would it be true to say claim that any specific religious tradition provides such overriding guidelines on this issue, as to command a moral consensus. But what MacIntyre seems to overlook, in citing this and other examples of moral disagreement, is that these need not be issues

of exclusive disjunction. If persons did not attempt to subjugate one another, the problem of war simply would not arise.

As Hick has written of the principle that it is evil to cause harm to others and good to benefit them; *"...this is so fundamental and universally accepted a principle that it is seldom formulated. And yet if all human beings lived in accordance with it there would be no wars, no injustice, no crime, no needless suffering."* 41.

Simple and idealistic as is this notion of Hick's, it is appropriate that it should be so if the issue in question is one of moral realism and the possibility, or otherwise, of the existence of moral absolutes within a Kantian philosophical framework. I would contend that the principle of non-subjugation of persons is capable, at least in theory, of transcending what MacIntyre believes to be the historical and cultural specificity of moral norms, and providing a useful basis for enquiry in moral debate. In citing examples of moral disagreement MacIntyre certainly draws our attention to the fact that there is no universally acceptable platform from which such disagreements can easily be solved. However, this is logically different from saying they are therefore impossible to solve.

MacIntyre's thinking, in After Virtue and in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? is rooted in the notion of tradition as the sustainer of good practice; within this, the Aristotelian account of justice is included within the framework of "morality of the virtues". MacIntyre writes as if traditions of rationality exist as discrete entities, providing us with exclusive world-views. The notion of traditions of enquiry, where the demarcation lines between one tradition and another are sharply drawn, is, however, insufficiently nuanced, as pointed out by Byrne;

"...the reality is surely that there are intellectual traditions but they are loose families. Individual thinkers differ in background beliefs, and traditions have loose, fluid boundaries, so that the background beliefs of those "inside" and those "outside" these groupings merge at the edges - with the result that intellectual

exchange and the development of new ideas that result from such merging is easily conceivable." 42.

A similar point has been made by Wokler, both in relation to MacIntyre's views about the Enlightenment, upon which, as stated above, much of his criticisms hinge, and in relation to the alleged moral deterioration of modern society. Wokler questions the existence of the Enlightenment as a discrete entity; according to him, the diversity of thought discernible between the mid Seventeenth and mid Nineteenth centuries was so great, and the tension between the thinkers so profound, that there can be no justification for asserting that a generic identity or common purpose, such as the notion of an "Enlightenment project" implies, actually existed. 43. MacIntyre, he believes, conceives the Enlightenment as a homogenous whole; this view fails to do justice to the variety and diversity of thought during a particular yet very protracted historical period, as Wokler suggests. It could further be argued that MacIntyre provides an over-simplistic view, failing to acknowledge the complexity of the process of historical change and the dynamics of historical development. MacIntyre seems to suggest there was a uniformity of thought regarding the characteristics of human nature and the moral laws which governed it, but as Wokler points out, philosophers other than Kant, including Hume, Turgot and Rousseau, subscribed to rather different views, which emphasised a developmental and evolutionary process in human history, with potential for good and evil. This is a point I shall return to.

Clearly, as pointed out by Wokler, MacIntyre has been highly selective in those thinkers he chooses to incorporate within his notion of an Enlightenment project. The omission of Eighteenth century French thinkers from the "stage" of an Enlightenment project" which, according to MacIntyre himself, was characterized by a rejection of traditional protestant and Catholic theology, is a serious omission. Voltaire [in Wokler's view the "Godfather" of the Enlightenment] certainly springs to mind as one who exercised considerable influence over the political life of his time; his writings on what he saw as the moral callousness and perversion of Christian belief prevalent at the time, and his concern in addressing issues which were specific to the rejection of traditional theology, surely entitle him to be incorporated within MacIntyre's notion of the Enlightenment.

44. Such serious omissions undermine the credibility of the notion itself, as conceived by MacIntyre.

Further, MacIntyre's notion of clearly defined traditions of enquiry is problematic, where issues of human moral judgement are concerned. In After Virtue he concedes that,

"...the fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership of communities such as those of the family, the neighbourhood, the city and the tribe does not entail that the self has to accept the moral limitation of the particularity of those forms of community." 45.

This concession that the moral starting point does not constitute an ideal moral order presupposes that such an order may, at least in theory, exist beyond the moral starting point. If this were not so, the concept of "the good" would be static and changeless, which is denied by the axioms of MacIntyre's thesis. Yet within his notion of clearly defined traditions of enquiry he seems to imply there is a one-to-one correspondence between the individual's moral judgement and the theoretical basis of that judgement. In reality, something more complex, more nuanced and more intuitive may take place when human beings make moral judgements. Byrne makes this point:

"...we know that the racial theories of Nazism are wrong by the violence they do to any discussible ideas of justified homicide. We judge by reference to moral realities which are to some extent independent of theorising." 46.

The implication here, is one of the existence of a core morality which transcends tradition specific and theoretic sources. Others interested in the same sphere of moral philosophy share this view of the transcendence of what may be called "intuitive moral knowledge" over moral theory. Adams, in Religious Ethics in a Pluralistic Society shares the view that the requirements of a common morality are not the same as the requirements of a shared ethical theory. 47. In the same recent publication, Stout cites the same example as Byrne, that of Nazi genocide, to illustrate the point that some moral truths - albeit, perhaps few - command universal acceptance without

recourse to a shared ethical theory. 48. The existence of any such truths, however, implies the existence of a morality that transcends history, culture and tradition.

Ultimately, the notion of sharply demarcated "traditions of enquiry" creates a strait-jacket which has far-reaching consequences for MacIntyre's theory of justice. His account of justice is entrenched within the notion of tradition as the sustainer of "good practice." As we have seen, he concedes that no particular starting point, an Aristotelian one or any other, necessarily constitutes an ideal moral order. Therefore, presumably, practices may be the subject of critical scrutiny. But MacIntyre does not make this clear; he writes as if the exercise of virtue is inherently rooted in the worth of practices. According to him, practice is,

"...any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." 49.

There is nothing here, which defines what is just, and therefore virtuous, independently of practice itself, therefore this analysis as it stands, seems to presuppose the intrinsic goodness of practice. In failing to sever the concept of justice from the performance of practice, MacIntyre pays too little regard to the possibility of potential evil in what, superficially, appears to be good practice. As pointed out by Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, "MacIntyre, Feminism and the Concept of Practice", heterosexuality is generally considered to be the norm, "good practice" in society, yet this practice contains within itself considerable potential for the subjugation of women. 50. MacIntyre gives insufficient attention to the roles of the participants in practice, and to subtle social and political aspects of supposed good practice, which might cause us to be more cautious in our unequivocal approbation of them. 51. The problem is inherent in MacIntyre's thesis in

After Virtue, I would suggest, because of his own "moral starting point"; a concept of justice which is rooted in and defined by, a rigid collectivism.

However, in his more recent work, Whose Justice? Which Rationality? MacIntyre does concede that within some societies, such as that of the post-Homeric Greeks, justice may be linked to individualism. Justice may be

"...a disposition to give to each person, including oneself, what that person deserves and to treat no one in a way incompatible with their deserts." 52.

This definition of justice entails the notion of personal desert. It is arguable, however, that in order to make any kind of judgement concerning desert, which MacIntyre now defines as a personal issue, it is first necessary to subject the supposed goodness of human practices to critical scrutiny. It is further arguable that, in present day society, the notion of giving to each person according to personal merit, is a notion which receives more widespread approbation and consensus of approval than has been the case historically. But if this is so, it can only have occurred because of changes in traditional practices [such as access to education and political life] which, in the past, have excluded whole sections of society. The exclusion of groups of persons from certain practices, on the grounds of social class, race or gender, has been the antithesis of any notion of individual desert. It is only because of critical appraisal of practices themselves, and consequent revision of what in reality is bad practice according to present human judgement, that the notion of personal desert makes any sense, and can flourish. "Good practice" in society, must be subjected to human judgement in this way, if the notion of desert is to be meaningful, and this must entail appraisal of "what is good" within practice.

MacIntyre makes some acknowledgement of this, in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? It remains his belief that each discrete tradition of enquiry has its own mode of rational justification, and that modern liberalism is just such another tradition of enquiry, which is unable to provide neutral ground from which rival traditions can be judged. There must be debate regarding problems of justice and practical rationality, but it is only from the perspective of his or her own tradition that

the individual can engage in debate both within it, and with rival and conflicting traditions. How, then, is the individual to proceed in this debate? According to MacIntyre, such engagement requires the acquisition of what he has called a "second first language", which,

"...in turn requires a work of imagination whereby the individual is able to place him or herself imaginatively within the scheme of belief by those whose allegiance is to the rival tradition, so as to perceive and conceive the natural and social worlds as they perceive and conceive them." 53.

Ultimately, it appears, the individual whose perspective derives from the tradition of modern liberalism employs precisely the same means of judgement in relation to issues of morality and conceptions of justice as those outlined by Reiman. The requirements of justice are grounded in human reason, and reason requires that one should extrapolate beyond one's own subjectivity, and, recognising the identical and equal subjectivities of others, attempt to identify with them.

As Wokler has pointed out in relation to what he believes was the wide-ranging thinking in what has been too sharply defined as "the Enlightenment", if any one principle characterized this period of intellectual development, it was the principle of toleration. For moral philosophy in the Eighteenth century, it did not follow that members of disparate traditions were unable to grasp the values of others, nor that perceived differences constituted insurmountable obstacles in debate.

"...A cosmopolitan spirit of tolerance and goodwill would be a welcome antidote to the fractious fundamentalism of many contemporary religious movements and the all-too-persistent ravages of ethnic and civil wars. The moral chaos of the modern world stems not from the failure of the Enlightenment project, but from its neglect and abandonment." 54.

In sympathy with this view, and extrapolating from Wokler's observation that certain Enlightenment thinkers adopted an evolutionary view of human development, emphasising the malleability of human nature and its potential for good and evil within a providential framework,

I believe it is possible to discern a continuum, indeed a revival of this kind of thinking, within both religious and "secular" spheres. Reiman's thesis is not a specifically "religious" one; he holds a naturalistic world-view. It is his contention, however, that what is essential to religion is the belief that there is something worthy of reverence, the human subject is the object of reverence and this is "the sacred." 55. Similarly Kaufman writes of a "serendipitous creativity," a creative cosmic force, acting as an evolutionary/historical trajectory, that has brought humanity into being and sustains it in being. 56. We are, he believes, biohistorical creatures; through our historical creativity we are far more than it is strictly necessary for us to be in strictly biological terms. He cites the examples of certain human acts and achievements, such as the invention of moveable type and the splitting of the atom, which have had far-reaching consequences for good and evil, consequences that were unintended in their historical time and could not have been humanly predicted. 57. In this way, the creative forces of history, and humans acting within history, seem to have a volition, a spiritual essence and dynamism intrinsic to themselves. It is within this conception that Kaufman wishes to locate and reconstruct the symbolic/linguistic concept of "God", in such a way that he believes will be more meaningful and relevant to humans as they find themselves in their present experience.

How far this is acceptable to Christianity, is not an issue I will be able to explore here. What I would suggest, however, is that this kind of theological thinking contains within itself the potential to move us beyond what MacIntyre believes to be our present state of moral disorder. Through a detailed examination of the dynamics of the historical process, we are able to perceive ourselves as part of a cosmic framework within which, as free and responsible human agents, we have some control over our destiny. We are framed by the historical past, but we also have the potential, at least to some extent, to frame our future destiny. Kaufman's theological reconstruction cannot lead us to absolute moral certainty; within this framework God is not only "serendipitous creativity" but "absolute mystery" and between these two concepts is the locus of faith. What is important, as Kaufman points out, is the possibility of discerning in the writing of many thinkers, both religious and secular,

"....profound moral concerns about the web of life on planet Earth, as well as deeply religious attitudes of awe and respect for, and even love of, the magnificent cosmic order of which we are a part; and their open expression of these things encourages similar attitudes in their readers." 58.

What we see in the work of Kaufman and Reiman, I would suggest, is a welcome revitalization of Enlightenment thinking, which allows us to proceed into the future with more optimism than MacIntyre provides. Whether such optimism is justified is a debatable issue, and one for which only the future can provide answers; what is clear is that there is sufficient thinking in the sphere of moral philosophy to refute Milbank's contention that there is any kind of consensus to support the view justice cannot be founded in human reason. And if it is possible to ground the notions of freedom and justice in universal human reason, we can have no reason to dismiss the notion of enquiry into shared ethical norms among the faiths as a useful basis for inter-faith dialogue.

It is vital that we should continue to discuss ethical concerns in inter-faith dialogue, for Milbank's thesis has far reaching consequences, not only in terms of the relationship between human reason and the apprehension of the moral virtues of justice and freedom, but in terms of what Ian Markham has discerned as the implications of Milbank's thinking towards increased intolerance and antagonism between faiths. Markham cites Milbank's essay in Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered, in which he states that,

"...As regards the general furtherance of the critical understanding of discourses (the minimum that religions can truly share in common) it will be better to replace "dialogue" with mutual suspicion....In the course of such a conversation, we should indeed expect to constantly receive Christ again, from the unique spiritual response of other cultures. But I do not pretend that this proposal means anything other than continuing the work of conversion" 59.

I would contend that it is not easy to see how Milbank's notion of a "conversation" differs from that of a "dialogue", but with Markham, would suggest that if it is one of mutual suspicion it can be of little avail in furthering tolerance and understanding of the religious and cultural diversity that is clearly an essential aspect of God's creation. Markham is surely correct in his judgement that, *"...the Milbank outlook feeds the tribal instinct to which large parts of the Christian narrative are so strongly opposed."* 60.

Markham's own thesis in Plurality and Christian Ethics is that the best defence for tolerance in a pluralist society is the framework of a theistic, specifically Christian metaphysic, rather than the framework of secular anti-realism. His claim is that,

"...religion is a life-transforming world perspective which affects every aspect of life...at the heart of the universe is goodness and love enabling all to be. This is what we mean by God. Theists find themselves in awe and reverence placing ultimate value on being at the heart of the Universe." 61.

In this respect, Markham's views would be in alignment with those of Kaufman, outlined previously. Markham contends that a theistic world perspective, rooted in a rationality provided by God, who has created an intelligible universe, provides the best possibly antidote to the nihilism inherent in secular reason. 62. What would be interesting would be to see how he would reply to naturalists such as Reiman, whose secularist stance incorporates the notion of the self as "the sacred". 63. Within a synthesis of secular/religious ethics, Christianity would be able to contribute to the public debate on issues of global concern without compromising its unique world-view, and in the confidence to look upon plurality as a manifestation of the beauty and diversity of God's creation, rather than a threat from which it must defend itself.

3. The Influence of Post-Enlightenment Liberal Ethics upon the Religions: the argument against grounding religious theory in a spurious commonality of practice

The final criticism of the soteriocentric approach to the theology of religions centres on the view that the notion of "soteria" must be grounded, in Christianity, in the theoretical basis of the faith, and cannot be severed from it. Here, the specific objection is directed towards what is conceived as the blurring of particular religious truth claims, by the influence of Post-Enlightenment liberal ethics. [As suggested by Wokler, theologians and philosophers are inclined to use the term "the Enlightenment" far too vaguely and broadly. For the purpose of this section I shall retain this terminology, since it is so widely used, although we should bear in mind that the notion of "an Enlightenment project" does tend to suggest a homogenous entity, which fails to do justice to the variety and diversity of thinking over a long period of historical change.]

D'Costa has argued that a "kingdom-centred" or "reality-centred" hermeneutic must derive from the theoretical norms of Christianity, to avoid the objection that they are otherwise merely grounded in modern liberal ethics, and seriously disregard the truth content of faiths' doctrinal systems. ⁶⁴ Here, D'Costa seems to suggest that it is both possible and necessary to make a clear distinction between an ethic that is grounded in a religious tradition, and one that derives from a secular humanist context. However, as I suggested above, no such clear distinction can be made, or ought to be made. The alternative suggestion, which I wish to explore, is that the close reciprocal relationship which exists between the ethical norms of a living faith, and the social reality in which it finds itself at a given time in human history, makes it both impossible and undesirable that we should attempt to make such a clear cut distinction. Praxis is grounded not only in religious theory, but is complexly enmeshed with cultural and historical moral norms. An anthropological approach to theological thinking in fact presupposes that, in late Twentieth Century Western and predominantly secular society, the norms and values held by the religious believer will inevitably be a complex admixture of the "purely religious" and "secular" influences of that society. If society influences religious thinking, and religion influences society, it may be

impossible to say how much statements of modern ethics derive from post-Enlightenment thinking and how much from the teachings and traditions of influential world faiths. But why need this concern us, provided that the moral and ethical norms which condition the thinker/believer are complementary and mutually sustaining, rather than contradictory and mutually opposed?

The fact of social and historical conditioning of theological thinking, and an implicit acceptance of this, can be discerned in the work of many theologians who nevertheless hold opposing views in relation to the theology of religions, [and who may accept in varying degrees the fact of this conditioning.] As a "representative inclusivist", D'Costa, in Christian apologetics, draws our attention to what he believes is Hick's misunderstanding or ignorance of the historical conditions which led to the formulation of the Catholic Church's "extra ecclesiam" doctrine in the Third Century A.D. and its retention through the Middle Ages. He writes of the historical situation of the Early Church, which was beset by problems of persecution and schism, and the ignorance of the Medieval Church which believed the known world to be "Gospel-saturated" and believed Islam to be a Jewish/Christian heresy, rather than an emerging world faith. 65. Implicitly, therefore, an understanding of the doctrine [and a defence of it] is only made possible by an understanding of the historical conditions which affected the Church's development and survival. What would be morally suspect, [if not indefensible] in today's world becomes morally explicable in its historical context.

We saw in Chapter 2, that our "representative exclusivist", Lesslie Newbigin, affirms that "truth" and "reason" are embodied in specific historical/cultural contexts which constitute the "plausibility structure" of a given society. 66. [Although as I have argued, his thesis is very one-sided, for he fails to concede the existence of this kind of conditioning upon the Biblical witnesses, and its possible influence in the formulation of a supernaturalist, incarnational interpretation of the historical events which are the content of Christian revelation.] Newbigin is another theologian who would assert the precedence of orthodoxy over orthopraxis in relation to the theology of religions, however.

"...When we absolutize words like justice and liberation we remain locked in our own definition of what these words mean. There is nothing to stand in the way of our imperial claims. When we place at the centre the one who is Lord and Judge, then we are on the way to the realization of a justice and freedom which are truly God's gifts, and a deliverance from our own imperial pretensions." 67.

Here, by a curious sleight of hand, Newbigin attempts to root the imperialist tendencies with which Christianity has been accused in the radically contemporary liberative "motifs" of orthopraxis. It is not easy to be convinced by this argument, however, since the weight of opinion seems to suggest that the reverse is true. It is Knitter's belief, [with reference to the "extra ecclesiam" doctrine] that, *"certainly it cannot be denied that in the past such doctrines and such christology have been used to justify the subordination and exploitation of other cultures and religions."* 68. Michael von Bruck holds that,

"...The Roman Catholic mission since the sixteenth century and Protestant missions since the eighteenth have been closely bound up with European colonial history. The converts often bowed to the political and economic pressures of the conquerors." 69.

This is endorsed by Leroy Rouner, who believes that Christianity is presented with a moral and historical challenge in confrontation with other traditions, because;

"...Christians have been responsible for colonising and even subjugating people of the Third World. For most Protestant theology of religions political and economic repentance for the sins of Western colonialism now also includes theological repentance for the sins of Western Christianity in denigrating the religions of the Third World." 70.

None of these theologians equate missionary activity with liberative tendencies, rather the reverse is the case; they suggest that the motivating forces behind the missions of history were

predominantly orthodox, theoretical, and rooted in an exclusivist Christianity. It is important to note that these theologians are not necessarily suggesting that the missionaries themselves had anything but the best intentions and the most sincere convictions that, by engaging in missionary activity, they were acting in accordance with the will of God. Nevertheless, if missionary activity was inextricably linked with Western imperial tendencies - and the weight of opinion strongly suggests it was - it is not easy to be convinced by Newbigin's assertion that, *"the revelation of the truth is a contradiction of all imperialisms."* 71. Christian mission to "reveal the truth" would seem both to derive from and to result in an increase of imperialist tendencies. Even more implausible is what seems to be the attempt on Newbigin's part to link contemporary liberative ideas with the motives of imperialism, as an alternative to the link which has been clearly discerned by several theologians between imperialism and the orthodoxy of historical Christianity. From a historical perspective, the juxtaposition of the notions of "liberation" and "imperialism" seems to be falsely conceived and contradictory.

In support of the thesis that, in the modern world, we are beginning to see a closer reciprocal relationship between religious beliefs and practice and the beliefs and practice of secular society, Hick himself has drawn our attention to the Early Christian Church's acceptance and support for slavery, and the necessity for modern humanist ethics to exert an influence upon the Christian commandment "to love thy neighbour as thyself", [Matthew 22, 39.] before slavery was brought to an end. 72. The conditioning of religious thinking by external historical and sociological forces may be discerned, whether we are talking about the religions themselves, or examining the thinking of particular theologians. As D.A.Pailin has written of Barth, and others before him,

"...What Ellis, Mansel and Barth found as the revealed "word" seems to readers at later times to have been noticeably influenced by their times. Whether or not it should be held that God reveals the divine nature and will in culturally relative ways so that the divine "word" is relevant to the contemporary situation, it seems clear that even those who assert the revealed origin of all

authentic theology show by what they produce that other factors contribute to it." 73.

A similar point is made by Gordon Kaufman, whose emphasis on modern historical awareness in relation to the theology of religions has led him to the conclusion that;

"...every theological position has always been taken, and every claim has been made, by some particular, limited, finite, human being, whether named Paul of Tarsus or Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin or Karl Barth." 74.

The examples I have cited of the conditioning of the religions and of religious thinkers by external factors, [and many more could be accumulated] serve to illustrate the fact that religions and thinkers cannot be assessed outside their historical and cultural spheres, as Hick himself concluded in relation to the ethical "track records" of religions, in his exercise, "On Grading Religions." 75. They also indicate that in the present day, as in history, it is likely that the religions both influence, and are influenced by, the external sociological and cultural climate, and it is probably impossible to discern the dominant direction of influence. But, I reiterate, why should it be a cause for dismay if the central concerns of the religions are influenced by post-Enlightenment liberal ethics, and are perceived in the present era as being in increasingly close alignment? Should it not, rather, be a cause for considerable optimism?

The Relationship between Hick's Philosophy and Theology of Religious Pluralism and Enlightenment Ethics: an over-view of his theological development

We saw above that it is possible to discern a considerable ambivalence in the attitudes of some theologians towards "the Enlightenment," in terms of its roots and its effects. I have also suggested that it may be necessary, according to Wokler's criticism of MacIntyre, to define what we mean by "an Enlightenment" rather more precisely; the term tends to be used broadly, and vaguely, by a variety of thinkers who deplore its perceived influence towards secularism and indifferentism as undermining the distinctively religious basis of society, with insufficient regard for the variety

and diversity of thinking associated with a long historical period of change. Newbigin, for example, sees Enlightenment thinking as rooted in the Christian tradition.

"...This new faith had indeed Christian roots. It had been brought forth out of a Christian culture, a culture pervaded by the idea that every human being is of supreme dignity as made in the image of God...But the new faith of the Enlightenment saw Christianity as merely one of the surviving traditions of which it had no further need." 76.

D'Costa believes that;

"...Philosophically, such an emphasis on morality as the uncontroversial bridge to avoid the impasse [in judging religious traditions other than one's own]...stems from an impoverished form of Enlightenment natural ethics which assumes incontestable universal moral norms that would be adhered to by all sensible persons. It should also be said that such a pragmatic approach is sometimes suggested by those who are frankly indifferent to religions and essentially wish to impose a humanistic agenda homogeneously upon all religions." 77.

The problem here is that it is quite possible for the individual to affirm moral realism, [and be very far from indifferent to religions] while nevertheless believing that the questions posed by this period of historical development refuse to go away. Fundamentally, the "post-Enlightenment question" asks whether a rational person is justified in affirming religious belief, without seeking some kind of external criteria of verification which would move the affirmation from one of belief to one of ascertained knowledge. Hence, the distinction between faith and knowledge, which we examined in detail in Chapter 1 in relation to Hick's philosophical theology of religious belief, is central to the post-Enlightenment debate. And the question of rational justification of religious belief is not answered, but merely moved one stage further away, in the modern era, by appealing

to the authority of the church, or to scriptural testimony, or to the apostolic tradition. [Newbigin.]

Whether we like it or not, the questions posed by the Enlightenment are likely to remain with us. It has however been recognized that the distinction drawn in the "ages of reason" between matters of fact, which are capable of being verified, and matters of belief, which are not, is too sharply drawn. Newbigin is right to draw our attention to this, and to note that the physical sciences, among other fields of "objective knowledge", increasingly acknowledge the role of conjecture and the "leap of the imagination" which is a necessary prerequisite for the formation of scientific hypotheses in the first place. 78. But it was in response to the questions raised by "Enlightenment thinking", and in acknowledgement of the central importance of these, that Hick, in the earlier part of his career, devoted himself to the exploration of the rationality and intelligibility of religious belief, as we also saw at the beginning of this thesis. The philosophical approach he adopted was to focus upon the intelligibility and rationality of religious belief rather than upon proof for the existence of God "ipso facto."

"...The question is not whether it is possible to prove, starting from zero, that God exists; the question is whether the religious man, given the distinctively religious form of human existence in which he participates, is properly entitled as a rational person to believe what he does believe?" 79.

Hick, as we have seen, argued that the rational person is so entitled.

"...It therefore seems prima facie, that the religious man is entitled to trust his religious experience and to proceed to conduct his life in terms of it." 80.

He has sought to defend a fact-asserting, experientially grounded account of religious belief, which is ultimately verifiable eschatologically. 81. But - and this is of crucial importance - he does not accept the validity of arguing from other peoples' experience. If the Christian believer is entitled to assert the veridical character of his or her religious experience, other believers from other faiths are equally entitled to do so. Hence the pluralist option;

"In establishing the rationality of the Judaic-Christian theist's belief in the reality of God, must it not also and equally establish the rationality of the Buddhist's belief, arising out of his own coercive religious experience, and likewise of Hindu belief and of Islamic belief and so on? We need, I think, have no hesitation in accepting this implication." 82.

Hick's account of rational religious belief, as I also outlined in Chapter 1, draws not only upon an argument from religious experience but upon an argument for innate human knowledge of that which is morally good. What we seem to see in Hick's work is the priority of the idea of an innate human ethic. Kant, whose work has been very influential upon Hick, gave precedence to the idea of a "categorical ought": the traditional order is reversed and the ethic itself is the categorical ought. The individual moral agent is so sure of the moral position that God's existence is argued for as a presupposition of morality itself. Moreover, the ethical ought is capable of surviving the decline of the religious metaphysic which may have provided the original matrix for the development of the ethical conception.

"...This wonderful religion with its great simplicity of statement has enriched philosophy with far more definite and purer concepts than it had been able to furnish before; but which once they are there, are freely assented to by Reason and are assumed as concepts to which it could well have come of itself and which it could and should have introduced." 83.

Here, Kant suggests that religion provides a matrix within which ethical conceptions develop within specific cultural and historical conditions, but that they are logically independent of the matrix and are capable of surviving the decline of the religious metaphysic.

In the work of Hick, I believe, we can discern the precedence of the moral imperative, in Kantian terms, which has been used as the means of evaluation of particular Christian doctrines. The morally relevant circumstances of our far greater knowledge and awareness of other world faiths imposes upon us the need to reinterpret the doctrine of the Incarnation and to bring about a shift,

within Christianity, towards soteriocentrism or what I have called anthropocentrism. This is not necessarily to suggest that the religious metaphysic is redundant; Mitchell is right to remind us that Kant's dictum developed against the background of a religious philosophical substructure. 84. However, with MacIntyre, and unlike Kaufman, he does not seem to envisage the possibility of the transcendence of Kantian ethics from their historical roots, within a framework of moral realism in which there is co-operation between religious and secular thinkers concerning issues of universal concern. What religious pluralism suggests is that this is a possibility, and that the environment within which this development may take place need not necessarily be exclusively Christian, and must have relevance to the modern context.

Hick wrote of the Real, in An Interpretation of Religion;

"...ethically its central theme should be the love/compassion to which all the great traditions call us; and in our sociologically conscious age this is likely to be increasingly a politically conscious and active agape / karuna which seeks to change the structures of society so as to promote rather than hinder the transformation of all human life." 85.

Here, he anticipates the trend of development of the pluralist theology of religions based on shared ethical criteria, although as we have seen in Chapter 6, other theologians, notably Paul Knitter and the Latin American liberation theologians Jon Sobrino and Juan Luis Segundo have gone further than Hick, to date, in formulating a precise agenda of common ethical concerns. Nevertheless, their ideas presuppose, and are implicitly dependent upon, the revision of traditional christology pioneered by Hick in God and the Universe of Faiths two decades ago, and they propose a soteriocentric centre for Christianity, in alignment with Hick's thinking in Problems of Religious Pluralism and in An Interpretation of Religion. 86.

In Chapter 4 of this thesis, I examined in detail Hick's reasons for rejecting traditional christology, and proposing in its place a mythological interpretation of the doctrine of the Incarnation. While he raised formidable philosophical and historical objections to the doctrine as traditionally formulated, it is likely that his strongest reasons for rejecting it in his "Copernican days" centred

upon the theological issues involved, ie. the implications of the doctrine, as he saw them, for the salvation of non-Christians. Hick's primary objections may therefore be viewed ultimately as moral objections rooted in disapprobation of the Christian failure to take seriously the religious experience of others. This is in alignment with his underlying philosophy of religious belief based on moral knowledge and religious experience, as outlined in Chapter 1. The subsequent developments in his theology of religious pluralism have reinforced the internal coherence of his theology as a whole; moral objections outlined in the 1970's have been further emphasised in his later publications.

The Future for a Global Theology of Religions based on shared Ethical Criteria

What is vital is that the religions, rather than debating the origins of liberal ethics, move to the forefront of the human endeavour to promote human rights and to combat injustice, oppression and conflict based on differences of race and belief - and should be seen to be doing so. Braybrooke notes, in his introduction in Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic that, *"Many people are disillusioned with religions and are not willing to base their behaviour on the teaching of a particular religious tradition."* 87. It is the claim of the religions that the goals of peace, justice and human rights derive from their teaching, although I have argued that today these ideals are complexly enmeshed with modern liberal ethics, and cannot be ascribed to the religions alone. But it is possible that, to the ordinary person, the religions of the world are held at least partially accountable for the failure to promote peace and to combat injustice, and this may be one of the root causes of the disaffection Braybrooke suggests. Extracts from the World Conferences on Religion and Peace, cited by Braybrooke, indicate that the religions themselves have begun to be aware of this and to be increasingly self-critical in these respects.

"....We believe that the political, economic, social and even religious institutions created by man are...in need of transformation...What is imperative, therefore, is not the total rejection of traditional values but an honest and critical

examination of them to separate the essential from the accretions of time." 88.

At the same World Conference on Religion and Peace, held at Kyoto, Japan in 1970, it was declared;

"...In order to restore credence in the moral and ethical authority of religion, the religious leaders of the world will have to take much more active and positive leadership in a continuous effort for creating effective awareness of human rights and their promotion at all levels." 89.

Four years later, at Louvain, Belgium, it was conceded by the World Conference that,

"...Often religious groups and institutions have been sidetracked from their real aim to become ideological instruments perpetuating unjust structures. Religion will be credible in the modern world to the extent that it risks its own security in promoting integral human development." 90.

Further, at the fourth Assembly of the World Conference at Nairobi, Kenya, in 1984, [and almost in Hickian terminology,]

"...We have become aware of much that binds us together. Ultimate reality is infinite, while our ways of describing and understanding it are necessarily finite, so we have learned that we must listen with respect and humility while others worship or describe their spiritual experience...We cannot wait until all outstanding differences are settled before turning to such questions as war, poverty, racism, injustice and oppression." 91.

These statements of self-criticism from the World Conferences on Peace and Religion, as much as the areas of consensus which seem to be emerging, may be seen as signs of hope that the religions have the potential to move to the forefront in issues of global concern, alongside humanists and rationalists, without jealously claiming the right, to which they are not entitled, to

have a monopoly of interest in these matters. It is vital for the distinctively religious world view, and for the survival of the faiths themselves, that they should succeed in doing so. As Thomas Hardy wrote in 1878,

"...Human beings, in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a first cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears." 92.

This thesis is an attempt, not to invent excuses for the "first cause", but to affirm that our anthropological orientation towards the religious reality of this moral authority obliges us, before all else, to "seek first the Kingdom." In doing so, it may be both necessary and appropriate, in the present era, to seek for greater links between secular and religious world views, as far as ethical issues are concerned. With Hick, however, one may still differentiate between the two categories in affirming the validity of religious experience, and awareness of a transcendental "Other", beyond the limitations of this present existence.

CHAPTER 7 NOTES.

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6. J.Milbank. "The End of Dialogue," in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. 1990. p.176.
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8. ibid. p.178.
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10. ibid. p.187.
11. ibid.
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25. *ibid.* ch.1.
26. *ibid.* p.2.
27. *ibid.* p.8.
28. *ibid.* pp.9-10.
29. *ibid.* p.10.
30. *ibid.* p.16.
31. *ibid.* p.9.
32. *ibid.* p.16.
33. *ibid.* p.17.
34. A.MacIntyre. After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory. London. Duckworth. 1981. p.18.
35. G.D.Kaufman. In Face of Mystery. p.198.
36. A.MacIntyre. After Virtue. p.104.
37. *ibid.* pp.204-205.
38. *ibid.* p.204.
39. *ibid.* p.104.
40. *ibid.* p.6.
41. J.Hick. An Interpretation of Religion. p.312.
42. P.Byrne. Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism. Reference and Realism in Religion. Basingstoke. Hampshire. Macmillan. 1995. p.114.

43. R.Wokler. "Projecting the Enlightenment". After MacIntyre. Critical Perspectives of the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre. eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus. Oxford. Blackwell. 1994. pp.108-126.
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45. A.MacIntyre. After Virtue. p.205.
46. P.Byrne. Prolegomena to Religious Pluralism. p.106.
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53. *ibid.* pp.394-395.
54. R.Wokler. "Projecting the Enlightenment." P.126.
55. J.Reiman. Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy. p.311.
56. G.D.Kaufman. In Face of Mystery. Ch.19.
57. *ibid.* p.273.
58. *ibid.* p.455.
59. I.Markham. Plurality and Christian Ethics. Cambridge. C.U.P. 1994. pp.145-146. quoting J.Milbank in ed. G.D'Costa. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. Maryknoll. New York. Orbis. p.190.
60. I.Markham. Plurality and Christian Ethics. p.146.
61. *ibid.* p.147.
62. *ibid.* p.194.
63. J.Reiman. Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy. p.311.

64. G.D'Costa. John Hick's Theology of Religions. A Critical Evaluation. p.181.
 65. *ibid.* pp.73-84.
 66. L.Newbigin. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. London. S.P.C.K. 1989. p.57.
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 70. L.Rouner. "Theology of Religions in Recent Protestant Theology." Concilium 183. p.109.
- The belief that missionary activity is inextricably linked with Christian exclusivism is also shared by H. Netland, [himself an exclusivist] who writes,
- "...it can hardly be denied that Christian exclusivism remained dominant within both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches until the nineteenth century. Certainly exclusivism played a major part in the emerging missionary movements of the Catholic and Protestant communities."*
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89. The first World Conference on Religion and Peace, Kyoto, Japan. 1970. p.176. Quoted in Braybrooke. p.40.
90. The World Conference on Religion and Peace, Louvain, Belgium. 1974. pp.42-43. Quoted in Braybrooke. p.62.
91. The World Conference on Religion and Peace, Nairobi, Kenya. 1964. p.202. Quoted in Braybrooke. p.80.
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